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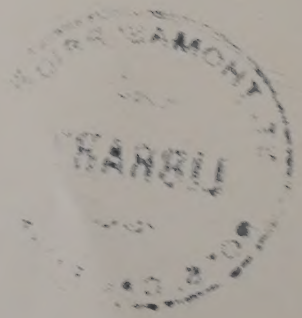
THE MYSTERY OF GRACE


KARBIL

THE MYSTERY OF GRACE

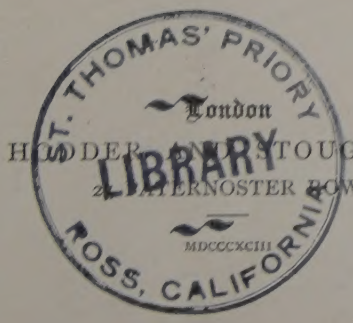
AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

HUGH MACMILLAN, D.D., LL.D., F.R.S.E.

AUTHOR OF

'BIBLE TEACHINGS IN NATURE,' 'THE GATE BEAUTIFUL,' ETC.



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I

THE MYSTERY OF GRACE

"I am instructed."—PHILIP. iv. 12.

THE word in the original which has been translated "I am instructed," is a pictorial word, and means literally "I have the secret," or "I have been initiated." It is a metaphor borrowed from classic story, and is full of deep significance. Paul made himself all things to all men, in order that he might win them to the knowledge of the truth. He made use of the things with which the persons whom he addressed were most familiar, in order to remove their prejudices, and to illustrate and bring home to their understandings and hearts the spiritual truths which he wished them to know. To the Jews he put his language in the mould of the types and sacrifices of the Old Testament dispensation; and to the Gentiles he compared the Christian life to the games of the amphitheatre, the ceremonies of their temples, and the customs of their common life. He acted in this characteristic manner when he wrote his Epistle to the Philippians. During his first visit

to Philippi, he met there one of the hierodules or priestesses belonging to the Temple of Dionysus, which was situated on the top of a mountain in the neighbourhood. This woman was hired by some of the citizens to tell their fortunes to the strangers who frequented the market-place, and her art brought no small gain to her masters. She was converted by the Apostle to the Christian faith; and this circumstance seems to have given him an opportunity of explaining that faith in the light of the old pagan religion of the place.

Among the Greeks there were mysteries—that is, secret rites or ceremonies—connected with their religion, to which only certain favoured persons were admitted. The chief of these were held in the city of Eleusis, about eleven miles distant from Athens, and were therefore called the Eleusinian mysteries. They were the oldest and the most sacred in Greece, and were celebrated from the earliest times down to the end of the fourth century of the Christian era. Every year, at the beginning of August, a grand procession, gathered from many parts of Greece, set out from Athens along the beautiful road called the Sacred Way, which led to the Temple of Ceres at Eleusis, the largest and most splendid temple in the world at the time. This temple, built on a rocky hill, was surrounded by high walls and shut out from public observation. For about twelve days the festival was continued; and the last ceremonies of the complex ritual were performed within the sacred

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precincts of the temple and in the Telesterion, or Hall of Initiation. The candidates had to prepare themselves for the mysteries by various symbolical rites, the design of which was to withdraw their attention from business and pleasure, and to create a tranquil and hallowed frame of mind. The period of probation lasted a whole year. The ceremony of admission was performed at night. Each candidate, crowned with myrtle, was obliged to wash his hands at the threshold with holy water. He was then blindfolded and led to the innermost part of the sanctuary, when the bandage was removed and he was permitted to behold and know the secrets of the place, which he was forbidden to disclose on pain of death. What the mysteries consisted of we are not clearly told. They must have had a very simple origin in far-off prehistoric times, and probably had something to do with the harvest-home rejoicings, with which the ingathering of the fruits of the earth has always been crowned. But in the course of ages mystical ceremonies and symbolic customs gathered round them, and they came in the end to represent the science and philosophy of the present and future world, so far as they were known at the time. Their chief design seems to have been to teach the immortality of the soul and the certainty of a future state of rewards and punishments, and to produce a deep conviction of the one great law underlying the whole system of things. And in these respects they appear to have soared far above the idolatrous and super-

stitious religion in which the common people believed. Those to whom the hidden mysteries were revealed were said to be initiated. They were under the special protection of the gods, and they alone were certain of the joys of immortality.

The Apostle Paul must have known about these Eleusinian mysteries, having been instructed in classic as well as in Hebrew lore; and therefore when writing to his converts in pagan lands he often made use of them as graphic images of the truths of the Gospel. As the Greeks and Romans had their mysteries, so had the Christian faith which he preached. He spoke of the mystery of iniquity, of the mystery of grace, of the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience, of the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world, which none of the princes of this world knew. He regarded the calling of the Gentiles and the rejection of the Jews, the relation between Christ and the Church under the symbol of marriage, and the resurrection from the dead, as mysteries. And he summed up all his references of this kind in the magnificent climax, "And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." The Eleusinian mysteries consisted of lesser and greater mysteries; there were degrees of secrecy and initiation connected with them. But the kingdom of

heaven which he brought near to his converts had the highest of all mysteries—mysteries that were kept hid from the foundation of the world, mysteries which concerned man's highest welfare for time and for eternity, mysteries for which the candidates had to prepare, not by a long and elaborate course of outward ceremonies, but by a total change of heart and life. And, unlike the heathen mysteries, the Christian mysteries were made known to every one, and revealed to the humblest capacity. It was not the wise, and the learned, and the noble only who were made to know the deep things of God, the unsearchable riches of Christ Jesus, the love that passeth knowledge; but the ignorant and simple-minded, the lowly in disposition and in circumstances, those who were converted and had become as little children. The things that were hid from the wise and prudent were revealed unto babes.

When Paul, therefore, says to the Philippian converts, "I am instructed," it is as if he had said "In the neighbourhood of your own city of Philippi is the shrine of the god you once worshipped in your heathen ignorance before you were converted. No one can get admission to the secret rites that are performed in that sanctuary, or be instructed in the secret doctrines that are taught there, unless he is initiated, goes through a great many arduous ceremonies and preparations for a whole year. But when he is initiated, all the solemn things of the pagan oracle are made known to him. In like

manner I have been initiated into the mysteries of grace. I have been admitted into the holy of holies of God's plans and purposes in regard to the salvation of the world, and these I now reveal to you, that you may have fellowship with me in this Divine knowledge, and rejoice with me in this sacred joy. I want you to be initiated into these mysteries along with me. I want you to be hierophants of the Lord Jesus Christ as I am."

And was not Paul prepared in a wonderful way for this initiation into the mysteries of the Gospel? We may say of his training at the feet of Gamaliel, the wisest and most liberal-minded of all the Jewish Rabbis, that it helped him out of the narrow dogmatism of the Jewish religion into the light and liberty of Christian truth. And even of that dreadful period to which he often looked back in after years with shame and sorrowful repentance, when, in the blinded zeal of a fanatic Jew, he pursued the Christians to prison and to death, we can affirm that it was a stern discipline, qualifying him with a higher and purer zeal to preach the faith which once he destroyed. That long ride from Jerusalem to Damascus, with its lonely heart-searchings and perplexed musings on the singular death of Stephen, and the strange things which the apostles of the new faith persisted, in spite of all opposition, in proclaiming—through the scenes associated with the ministry of Him who spake as never man spake—was like a long avenue of approach—a walk on the Sacred Way—to the

sanctuary where the truth was to be revealed to him from heaven. What an initiation that was, when the Lord Jesus in person appeared to him as he was nearing his destination, in a glory that made the noonday effulgence of the sun pale beside it, and showed him what great things he must suffer for His sake! Blinded to all outward things by the Divine light, with eyes bandaged as it were for three days and nights, during which he did neither eat nor drink, he was led into the inmost sanctuary of grace; and there Ananias, the Jewish disciple, the link between the old and the new faith, who had himself made the remarkable transition, opened his blind eyes and disclosed to him the mysteries of godliness which changed his heart and his whole life. What a preparation for his great work were those three mysterious years of solitude in Arabia, before he began his public ministry, of which nothing is told us, but of which we are free to conclude that they were spent on Sinai, the ancient mountain of the law, in acquiring that thorough knowledge of the relation of the Law to the Gospel, of the old dispensation of types and shadows to the new dispensation of living realities, which he made it the business of his after life to unfold in the clearest and most forcible manner! Never was there any candidate for the Eleusinian mysteries who went through such careful and trying preparations for his initiation, as the Apostle for his initiation into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. And therefore no one was

more entitled than he to say, "I am instructed." "I know the secret of the universe; I have the key to all the perplexities of this unintelligible world."

We know not what effect the disclosure of the secret of the Eleusinian mysteries had upon those to whom it was revealed. It was probably only a barren kind of knowledge, that exercised no influence at all upon their daily life, a mere theory or philosophy of the universe which had no practical value. And yet, judging from the awful sanctions with which it was hedged around, and from the terrible penalties connected with the revealing of it, it may have been some fatal secret, the knowledge of which may have weighed heavily upon their spirits, and taken all the joyance out of life, as the possession of a terrible secret must always do. There is a tradition of the early Christian Church, that when Lazarus was restored to life he never smiled again, his personal experience of the secret of death having made life a burden of sadness to him, owing to the thought that he should have to go through it all once more. It is reported of an old Scottish house, that when the heir succeeds to the title and estates he is told an hereditary family secret, and the secret is of such a dreadful nature, that when he once comprehends its full meaning and import he is never the same again, and all the scions of this noble house have passed through life with a dark cloud over them. And so it is in life usually. In childhood we are unconsciously happy. But a time comes in later years

when our eyes are opened and the secret of the race is revealed to us, and we are overwhelmed with the awful trouble of the world; and though we may sometimes have happy hours in which we forget the secret, life is changed from that hour. We know that we are to die, that we can only get a very limited amount of enjoyment and success out of life, and that we must of necessity go through a certain or uncertain amount of sorrow and suffering. We are perplexed with the mysteries of life, so that our feet well-nigh slip, and we feel indeed that he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

But that was not the effect which Paul's initiation into the mysteries of grace produced upon him. So far from being depressed and discontented with his lot, he was never before so satisfied with it. It was no awful heart-crushing, life-blighting secret that was made known to him. It was indeed the fear of God that was the beginning of his wisdom, but that fear had no torment in it. It was filial fear, the fear of God as his Father, who had revealed Himself to him in Christ Jesus as His reconciled and faithful Friend; and that fear cast out all slavish fear, so that he could come to Him with confidence, and trust Him in all his experiences. He feared God, and knew no other fear. He was in the centre of the charmed circle, and all the powers of evil had no power over him.

So long as the old geocentric idea prevailed which made the earth the centre of the universe,

with the sun and the stars revolving around it, everything was in confusion; there were difficulties which could not be solved on that principle. But when the heliocentric idea dawned upon the minds of astronomers, which made the sun the centre of the solar system, round which the earth and the planets revolved, then what was before inexplicable was made as clear as daylight; everything resolved itself into its proper place, and every difficulty vanished. And so the Apostle Paul had got into the true relations of things. He found out that God was the centre, not a mere impersonal force, but a God of love who had shown His love by sending His own Son into our sinful world, and into our perishing nature, that all old things might be made new. The atonement of Christ was the heart of the system of things. The cross of Christ was the key that explained all the mysteries of the world.

Had he sorrows? They were meant to give him the fellowship of Christ's sufferings—that through that hallowed fellowship he might become more like Christ. Had he losses? These losses were intended to teach him the strange paradox of the blessedness of the poor in spirit, whose is the kingdom of heaven. His life since he had embraced Christianity had been changed for the worse so far as earthly things were concerned. He had abandoned a position of high influence and great promise, and become an outcast, persecuted and despised. But the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ had taught him

that all these outward losses and trials were proofs of a Saviour's wise love, and part of a heavenly discipline of faith and patience, by which he was being prepared for the inheritance of the saints in light. Having got possession of the highest good, he was not cast down although he failed to possess temporal good things at the same time. Delivered from the greatest evil, the evil of sin, he felt all other burdens light in comparison. Sin was the only thing really adverse to his well-being; and that taken away, all things else would work together for his good. He knew that his times were in the wise and loving hands of One who, having bestowed upon him His unspeakable gift, would bestow upon him all inferior necessary blessings, and withhold from him all unnecessary trials. Come weal or come woe, it would be all for the best. His whole life was a plan of God, and therefore nothing of all that God designed for him would fail. Being thus instructed, having this secret of the Lord, he knew how to be abased and to be uplifted, how to be full and to be hungry, how to abound and to suffer need. He had learned in whatsoever state he was, therein to be content.

It is very pathetic to think that Paul was a prisoner in Rome when he wrote the words of the text. It was not in the inside of a temple, but in the inside of a prison, that he felt the full benefit of the initiation of which he spoke. Hitherto he had supported himself by his handicraft. It was a toil-

some, poorly-paid work at the best. But by means of it he was able to pay his way, and to minister the blessings of the Gospel to those who needed them without being chargeable to any one. But now he was reduced to the greatest straits. Things had gone very hard with him: he was in want of the common necessaries of life. But he was too proud to tell his converts and friends of a want which they ought never to have allowed to exist. The very depth of his gratitude to the Philippian saints for the timely aid which they sent him, showed how great must have been his need. And yet he could say of that time of sore privation, that he had learned the secret of peace. He had been initiated into the mystery of the purpose and design of all his trials and afflictions, and therefore he could bear them patiently.

There was another notable prisoner in Rome at the same time with the Apostle Paul, no less than the famous British general Caractacus. Defeated, after a nine years' struggle with the Roman power, in a great battle in Wales, he was carried captive to the imperial city to glorify the triumph of the Emperor. Set free on account of his heroic bravery and the noble speech in which he pleaded for his life, he was kept in honourable captivity for many years in Rome, and there, according to the voice of tradition, he met the Apostle Paul, and was converted by his teaching and example to Christianity. If this tradition be true, this was the first native of the British Islands who was initiated by Paul into

the mysteries of the Gospel. And if Caractacus had, by native dignity of character, learned to bear his misfortunes bravely, we may be sure that, initiated by Paul in the Christian faith, he would be a nobler and happier man as the captive of Claudius than he had been as the commander-in-chief of the native armies of Britain on his own romantic hills. Vast changes have taken place since then. The first-fruits have been followed by a glorious harvest. Millions have learned the secret of Paul, and lived a life of faith in the Son of God, and died in the sure hope of a glorious immortality. We are the heirs of all these ages of Christian faith. We have succeeded to a great tradition of Divine truth. We have had the legacy of the spiritual thought and experience of all the Christian centuries; and the doctrines of the Cross are taught to us, associated with the reverence of long ages which have all done homage to them.

The momentous question is, How do they affect you personally? Are you still among the number of the uninitiated, to whom the mysteries of godliness are mysteries indeed, in which you have no share, and regarding which you have no experimental knowledge? Esau was called a *profane* person, though he lived, so far as we know, an ordinarily good and moral life. For the literal meaning of the word profane is one who is outside the fane or temple, one who is not admitted into the inner shrine, and allowed to take part in its

ceremonies and privileges. Are any of you in this sense profane persons, even while members of churches; living outside of your spiritual privileges and blessings, even while apparently enjoying them? The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper were called holy mysteries by the early Christian Church, because only the initiated could partake of them with spiritual profit. And are these ordinances mysteries to you still, because only man, and not the Lord Jesus Himself, has initiated you into them, opened the door only to the outward enjoyment, and not to the inward spiritual enjoyment of them? How foolish to live wilfully ignorant of truths that would make you wise unto salvation. How foolish to refuse to possess the secret of a quiet life, which has been the great quest of man from the beginning of the world until now. Many of you, I know, are longing for the possession of this secret. It may be yours at any time if you are prepared to pay the cost—to count, like Paul, all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.

You have heard of the old-world fable of the Sphinx. This monster, half a woman and half a lion, devastated the land of Thebes. Seated on a rock close to the town, she put to every one that passed by a riddle, and if they were able to solve it they were promised the sovereignty of the land, but if they failed, they were cast from the rock on which the Sphinx stood into a deep abyss. Life is a

Sphinx that proposes the great riddle to you, "What must I do to be saved?" upon which eternal interests depend. If you can answer it, then you pass into eternal life; if you fail, then you go down to the abyss. If you can answer it as Paul answered it to the Philippian jailor who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, then the secret of the Lord will be with you, and you will know that you are not appointed unto wrath, but to obtain salvation. Henceforth you are called not servants but friends, for everything that your Father doeth is made known unto you.

In ancient times there was associated with the worship of Dionysus, the god of the heathen Philippians, a labyrinth consisting of a vast number of intricate subterranean passages, in which a man would be sure to lose himself. Theseus, we are told, was furnished with a ball of thread by means of which he passed with ease and safety through all the tortuous passages. And so, if you have faith in Christ as your own personal Saviour, you will have placed in your hand the clue which will enable you to thread your way out of all the labyrinthine dangers and evils of the world. You will have the question of your well-being removed from your circumstances to your souls. You will be instructed, like the Apostle Paul, to be exalted and abased, to abound and to suffer want, with equal contentment and composure of mind. You will be initiated into the mystery of the universe; and resting on a heart of infinite love and an arm of infinite

power, you will be assured that all that can affright you is under their firm control, and you will have the perfect peace of the mind that is stayed upon God.

Those who were initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries, as I have said, were forbidden on pain of death to disclose them. Members of Freemason and of other secret societies are sworn to the utmost secrecy in regard to what takes place in their assemblies. But it is not so in regard to those who are initiated into the mysteries of grace. They are commanded to publish them everywhere, so that every one may be partakers with them of like precious faith. These mysteries are not esoteric mysteries for the favoured few; they are for all—for all need them, as they need the vital air, and the vital light of heaven, and the vital food of earth. Unlike Plato or Socrates or Gamaliel, Jesus Christ came not to win a few devoted followers, to found a school of philosophy, or to form a narrow sect, but to regenerate the whole race of mankind. And He says to every one that has ears to hear and hearts to understand, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." And if you are instructed yourselves in these mysteries, you cannot but wish to instruct all whom you can influence. You can speak not from conjecture or opinion, but from experience. And this will give confidence and earnestness to your appeals. You do not ask persons to be puffed up with mere barren theories

and vain philosophies, but to be edified with the true wisdom ; and from your own enjoyment of all that that true wisdom can do for you, you can say, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

II

THE MYSTERY OF HEALING

"I am the Lord that healeth thee."—Ex. xv. 26.

THIS revelation of the Lord as a healer was a natural sacrament. It was made beside a bitter well, whose waters were made sweet; and the Lord showed the deep significance of the occasion by connecting the great spiritual truth with the natural symbol. It was no chance circumstance that Marah should be the first experience of the Israelites in the wilderness. God placed it there, and led His people up to it designedly, to teach them a profound religious lesson. The bitter well was a representation of the diseases that belonged to their old life in Egypt; and the sweetening of its nauseous waters was a symbol of the removal of these diseases, and their immunity from them, in consequence of obedience to God's laws of holiness and health in the new land and the new life before them. God healed the evil of the natural world as an outward proof that He could heal the deeper and more trying evils of the human world.

We have no reason to suppose that a miraculous

efficacy was given to the tree cast into the water, for the special purpose of doing what it could not accomplish by its own inherent powers. In nature there are many trees and shrubs which possess the power of precipitating the mineral particles that render water bitter, and making it pure and sweet. We are told that the tea-plant was first used in China for the purpose of counteracting the bad qualities of the drinking water, and in that way its stimulating properties were first discovered. The adventurers who first explored the western lands of America infused into the alkaline water of the prairies a sprig of sassafras, or wild sage, to purify it; while in India a kind of bitter nut is ground down and mixed with stagnant water, to clarify it and make it wholesome. And a tree with natural properties of a similar kind may have been that which God guided Moses to select. It must have been some rare tree, of whose virtues Moses himself was ignorant, since it needed God to find it for him.

But the point of the incident is that, though the sweetening of the water was accomplished by the inherent virtue of the tree itself, it was God Himself who gave the virtue *originally* to it, and in this case connected together cause and effect. Without the Divine guidance and blessing the beneficent result would not have been produced. The capacity of discovering and using healing medicines in nature is thus ascribed directly to God; and the incident is

made a sacramental occasion for the illustration of the great truth, that while in ordinary life we use the means of healing, it is the Lord Himself that healeth, and without His power and blessing no second causes can avail.

One of the most comforting aspects in which God could reveal Himself to us is that of a healer. It is an aspect in which we have frequent need to regard Him in this world full of diseases and sufferings. Deep in the nature of God lies this healing purpose; deep in His plan of creation has it been embedded. It is no design or intention of yesterday, called forth by the emergency. It existed before there was any disease in the universe, or any sin to cause sickness or pain. God foresaw the possibility of the creature whom He had made in His own image, and endowed with the marvellous gift of personal freedom, transgressing in the exercise of that liberty the commandment of God, and incurring the penalties of disobedience; and in His mercy He provided for this possibility. When He laid the foundations of the world, He created materials admirably adapted to restore the human system when disordered, in anticipation of, and readiness for, the use that should be made of them long afterward. Just as He stored up in the bowels of the earth those vast masses of coal, metals, and minerals which were to be utilised when the curse of toil in the sweat of his face was to be pronounced upon man; so He stored up magnesia and iron and

sulphur in the rocks, and medicinal salts in volcanic springs, to await the time when man should require them to cure the diseases which the curse of sin should bring upon him.

When God directed Moses to put a particular tree, growing in the Sinaitic desert, into the bitter well of Marah to sweeten it, we must believe that it was God who gave the healing properties to that tree, and that these properties existed long before this use was made of them, and were designed for it. When the Jesuit priest in South America, in the dreadful thirst of fever, drank from a pond into which a Peruvian bark tree had fallen, impregnating its waters with its peculiar properties, and was cured, we must believe that God intended this discovery to be made, formed the tree originally for the cure of human fever, and brought man, who needed it, in contact with the remedy, in His own good time and way. The healing properties of rhubarb and willow bark and gentian, and numberless other vegetable substances that might be named, were imparted to them long before they were actually required by the disorders that were brought upon the human constitution by the great moral lapse. If there is any virtue in these remedies which we use for illness, they must have been designed from the very first for the very purpose to which we now apply them. We cannot suppose that they were the result of a mere blind chance, a mere accidental or capricious application to undestined medicinal uses. We must

attribute the beneficent arrangement to the wise forethought of Him who is never taken unawares, and ever mingles mercy with judgment. The Balm of Gilead was the product of trees that were created long ages before man came into the world; and many of the animal and vegetable medicines were in existence before man's fall; and we must conclude that they were fulfilling the ends of their creation when they were removing the effects of sin upon the body of man. We are thus brought face to face with the striking fact that God did not suddenly assume the name of Healer when sin and its attendant evils came into the world, but had taken that name long ages before, and had a healing scheme in view when the foundations of the earth were laid.

We see, too, how thoroughly, and from the beginning, God took to Himself the name and function of Healer, from the fact that He has placed the disease and the remedy, the poison and the antidote, side by side. The manchineel is a deadly tree, but its poison is neutralised by the white ash, which always grows together with it. The sting of the nettle is soothed by the dock-leaf that is found flourishing on the same rubbish-heap. Humid regions and marshy places produce ague and malaria and rheumatism; but the willow, the pine tree, the eucalyptus, and the fragrant plants, whose aromatic perfume deodorises the air and purifies the blood, luxuriate in such places. There

is no plague anywhere but the means of curing it may be found in the same locality. Vegetable poisons are counteracted by vegetable remedies, and mineral poisons by mineral remedies. We see in our bodies not only the mechanism of health, which is natural, but also the power which enables the frame to cast off the unnatural disorders of disease. Most marvellous are the arrangements made in the body for curing accidents and ills that but rarely occur. Muscles that have been severed and bones that have been broken have provision made for their union in the natural processes of the body. God is thus the Healer not only at the moment when the trouble happens, but in the preparations which He has made beforehand for its removal, whenever it should come. And this gives us a much higher perception of His power and goodness.

And all this pre-arrangement of Providence in the constitution of nature and in the construction of our own frames for the remedy of disease, points significantly to the great Physician, who healeth all our diseases. He was foreordained to be the Healer before the foundation of the world. The whole system of things was constructed by Him as the Mediator with a view to redemption ; and we are led to the inevitable conclusion that the fall of man was no accident, calling for some new expedient, some undreamt-of device, to repair the evil it had wrought, but rather an act the whole character and issues of which God had foreseen, and for which

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He had provided a suitable and effectual remedy. In the very heart of God, and in the very constitution of the world, the idea of healing lay. Sin brought disease and disorder into the world; God brought healing and harmony. God created man in order that he might become holy and happy in the Divine service; and since man has fallen into sin through the abuse of his freedom, God carries out His original purpose under the new conditions which sin has produced. He works the painful consequences of sin into the plans of love, and thus makes them salutary instead of destructive. Toil teaches obedience, pain produces humility, and death directs aspiration to a heavenly hope. And thus the darkest human experiences enter as elements into the great redemptive process, and through the very evils that his sin has brought upon him, man is healed and educated for the destiny for which he was created.

God as the Healer is revealed to us by Christ Jesus. He manifested the Father in the special form of the Healer. The miracles performed by Him consisted chiefly in healing. He went about all Galilee healing all manner of sickness and disease among the people. And the reason of this was that bodily diseases represented the more dreadful diseases of the soul which He came to remove. Every cure which He wrought represented the deliverance of the soul from some particular kind of moral evil. He thus showed how close was the

connection between disease and sin. All disease has a spiritual origin. All material corruption was produced by spiritual corruption. Evil spirits are older than any form of material evil. Had there been no spiritual wickedness in high places, there could have been no corruption, no disease, no death on earth. All diseases, therefore, were and are spiritual to begin with. Three-fourths of the elements that enter into them are spiritual, and three-fourths of the remedies that must be used for them must also be spiritual. Apprehension, and memory, which affords the ground of fresh apprehension, are truly the source of most of the pain of our life. Take away those alarming qualities of reason, and the physical pang that remains is but a comparatively slight and momentary suffering. The reason why idiots, as a rule, are so remarkably healthy is that they are free from those mental worries which cause most of our physical troubles. Sin is thus soul-disease, and the parent of all disease. Remove the iniquity of the soul, and universal healing comes in. And hence it was that Jesus addressed Himself first to the deep-lying disease before healing the superficial manifestation of it—cured the sin of the soul before curing the palsy of the flesh. He healeth all our diseases *by* forgiving all our iniquities.

Jesus Himself was exempt from sickness and disease, because, although He bore the penal consequences of sin, He had no personal sin; and yet it was not by a mere word of power, costing Him

nothing, that He healed them. His miracles of healing were not the mere expression of a Divine benevolence. He accomplished all His cures on earth by deepest personal sympathy with the sufferer. He wept when He raised Lazarus from the dead; He sighed and looked up to heaven when He cured the deaf and dumb man. Virtue went out of Him when He cured the woman with the issue of blood. It is said significantly, when He restored many people, that He Himself bore their sickness and carried their sorrows. In order to acquire the power of healing, He hungered, thirsted, was weary. The Roman scourge wounded Him; the crown of thorns pierced His brow; the cross lifted His sufferings to the highest pitch of endurance. The cross was the healing tree which Jesus cast into the bitter Marah of all our sicknesses and diseases. And this bitter tree of suffering and death, put into the bitterest human trouble, cures it. It makes a medicine of nature's gall, as a skilful physician uses the poisons of earth to cure its diseases.

We can see a deep-lying, far-reaching significance in the fact, that the principle of mutual similarity between remedy and disease formed the basis of ancient medical practice, and is fast becoming the basis of our modern therapeutics. That principle is engraved on the very forefront of our salvation. It is shadowed forth in type and symbol and prophecy. The brazen serpent was lifted up to heal those who were bitten by the fiery serpents, as a prophetic

symbol that the Son of Man would be lifted up on the cross to heal the sinful souls and bodies of men. And just as you bruise the aromatic leaf or the bitter root or bark in which medicinal virtue lies, in order to obtain their healing powers, so it pleased the Lord to bruise His own Son, that healing virtue might flow from Him to us. God lets the sin of the world do its very utmost on the Sinless One, and then He takes the seeming triumph of evil and triumphs over it by making it the means of banishing evil from the world. And is not this the very way in which Pasteur and Koch and other scientific medical men are endeavouring to remove the evil of disease from the world, by making that very thing upon which the disease has exhausted its virulence the means of curing it? God is revealing to our foremost philosophers, by their profound studies into the mysteries of nature, how the physical evil of the world may be cured; how disease itself, given in a modified or attenuated form, like the process of vaccination, is the most effectual cure for the disease. And He is revealing to us, in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, how the spiritual evil of the world—the ultimate source of disease, suffering, and death—may be cured by the same divinely-appointed method. He who was made sin for us hath redeemed us from its curse; and by His stripes we are healed.

In these two great facts, then, that God has given His own Son as the Healer of the world, and has provided the means of healing from the founda-

tion of the world, we have a guarantee that He will heal our Marah of trouble and disease, whatever it may be, if we seek His help. The individuality of human beings makes ordinary medicine always more or less empirical and tentative. When every organ is a separate problem, and no two constitutions are absolutely alike, it follows that the treatment of disease must necessarily be very uncertain. But the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from *all* sin. His salvation is the only universal panacea—adapted to all, available for all.

But not only does Jesus heal us individually; He also bestows upon us "gifts of healing." Just as He bestows His own healing power on some unconscious herb or mineral, so He bestows upon ourselves, in the conscious use of them, His own healing power in enabling us to heal others. The gifts of healing which the early Christians enjoyed are perpetuated, not in a miraculous but in a natural way; not in "faith cures" practised by ignorant and credulous pietists, but in the more real and satisfactory cures of science; in wonders of healing effected in our hospitals, which a quarter of a century ago would have been deemed impossible; in the more accurate knowledge acquired by better methods of study, and in the tender ministries of the more favoured classes to the poor helpless victims of disease. And just as Christ Himself did not win His triumphs over disease and death by the mere exercise of a nominal faith, costing Him nothing, so

we cannot triumph over our modern disease by spells of faith, expecting to win by a mere presumptuous effort, costing us nothing, what can only be gained by earnest thought, and hard labour, and deep sympathy. If, like Moses, in the application of the desert tree to the bitter Marah, we regard the operation of God's hand in the use of the healing means, we are exercising faith, while we are taking advantage of the resources which science has placed in our power; and we have a far greater assurance that by the use of such means our faith will effect a cure, than if we presumptuously depended upon our faith alone.

It is to our Christian religion that we owe our care for the sick and the disabled. It is the Cross of Christ that has taught us to heal the bitter Marah of disease. In the natural world the creature that is hurt or ill is set upon, or at best neglected, by its fellows, or it leaves the unheeding herd to die in loneliness. In the human world, where the race is to the swift and the battle to the strong, those who are worsted and wounded in the struggle of life are left to perish with little sympathy. And there is a hard philosophy among us which asserts that efforts to remove sickness and disease are hindering the operation of a beneficent law which weeds out the sickly specimens of the human race, that the fittest may survive. But we have not so learned Christ. He brought in a new law, a higher law than the survival of the fittest; gave a "new commandment"

—the commandment of love—especially for the weak and wronged. To Him heart the very presence of trouble was a silent appeal for help. The poor, the sick, the desolate, the outcast—these ever found in Him a tender friend. He brought in the law of grace—the higher law by which the strong are selected, not to extinguish the weak, but to help the betterd souls of humanity to fourfold again. And He has given to us the greatest and sweetest motive of all in saying Himself alongside of our humanity—affected in all our afflictions, identifying Himself so closely with the case of the most abject sufferer, that what we do for that sufferer we do for Him. "I was sick, and ye visited me."

are strewn thick with these pink scales, that contrast so sadly with the fresh young foliage from which they have fallen. It is the autumn of the spring, the fall of the winter leaves in order that the summer leaves may have room to grow. Nature is casting off the poor garments that clothed her in her time of destitution, in order that in her time of wealth she may array herself in her garments of beauty and glory. Thus we see in nature that the process of divestiture is a living process. It is a phenomenon of growth. It is not death that removes these bud-scales, but life, growing, expanding life, that seeks to free itself from all trammels, and to obtain room for renewed progress, pushing out of the way whatever may obstruct. We see among the plants and trees of the field, more conspicuously manifested, what takes place in our own bodies when the teeth of the child drop from its little gums in order that the teeth of manhood may take their place, and when the particles in the blood renew themselves as the old decay. It is not death, therefore, that takes away, but the higher life concealed beneath that seeming death which begins to develop itself. Death is only the casting away of worn-out vestures in order that new may be put on.

We have a striking illustration of this law, which pervades the kingdom of nature and grace, in the case of blind Bartimeus. He heard the tramp of a great multitude passing by while seated, as he was wont, by the wayside begging. The unusual stir

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aroused his curiosity and kindled a longing in his soul, which had not yet given up hope. His blindness, by forcing inwardly and concentrating his gaze, had opened up to him a new world of thought. While sitting day after day waiting for alms he would muse upon the promises of God, and divine in them a meaning which none of those who saw with their bodily eyes had imagined. And now that the Son of David, in whom these promises were to be fulfilled, was near at hand, he was prepared to welcome Him with all his heart. His need of Him had sharpened his spiritual senses, and he was quick to recognise Him, and to understand that the relieving of such necessity as his was the very business that had brought the Son of David into the world. He was conscious, as the iron is of the magnet, that there was a Power at hand to heal if he could only bring himself within its sphere. And no sooner was he brought under the vernal influence of Christ's presence, no sooner did the Sun of Righteousness arise upon Him with healing in His wings, than he immediately acted as the dormant buds do when quickened by the breath of spring. He cast away his garment and arose and came to Jesus. It was a process of spiritual life and growth. The beggar's garment suited his destitute and blind condition. It was perhaps the badge of his profession, by which he appealed to the pity and charity of the public and gained his livelihood. But now when his eyes were to be opened, and his life

enlarged and enriched, it was a hindrance and a burden, and must be got rid of.

This incident is highly significant. It is a revelation of the personality of Bartimeus as clear and complete as if his whole biography had been recorded. The restoration of such a man to the usefulness of life was a great gain to humanity. He would never have been a beggar had he not lost his eyesight, and with it his power to earn his own livelihood. And having regained his eyesight through the mercy of his Lord, he would doubtless employ the unusual powers of body and mind which he possessed in earning an independent living, in doing good to others, and in testifying practically in every available way his devotion to his Saviour. The excited people strove to push him aside and to hush his importunate cries. But Jesus showed, by stopping on His way to inquire into his case and to cure him, though He was hastening to Jerusalem to accomplish the salvation of the world, that his personal needs and hopes were sufficiently momentous to arrest the steps of Omnipotence. Such a man, with his great soul in his beggarly garments, was the hero of the occasion; all the rest of the crowd were but accessories and ciphers. The interest centres all in him; and he alone of all the multitude has had his brief biography immortalised.

But the action of the blind beggar, in casting aside his garment in order to come to Jesus, means to us much more than a mere revelation of personal

character — a disclosure of his faith and zeal. It may be taken as a type of the removal of the hindrances of whatever kind that prevent a soul from coming to Jesus as its Saviour. There are three spiritual lessons which the incident teaches: first, the necessity of casting away our garment of self-righteousness in order to come to Jesus; secondly, the necessity of casting away the garment of effete forms and methods in order to grow in knowledge and in grace; and lastly, the necessity of casting away in the end the garment of the body by death, in order to be present with the Lord and to see Him as He is. Let us glance briefly at these three lessons.

1. The necessity of casting away our garment of self-righteousness in order to come to Jesus. We are all naturally like Bartimeus, blind beggars by the wayside of life, crying out, "Who will show us any good?" Blindness is used in Scripture as descriptive and inclusive of all spiritual losses. It is the greatest of all privations, for it is by means of sight that we take in most of the natural and the human world. The sinner dwells in darkness. The things that belong to his peace are hid from his eyes. His faculty to apprehend the things that are unseen and eternal is lost. God is light; and the ungodly soul that sees and knows Him not is indeed blind. And being thus blind, we are of necessity spiritually beggars. The sin that limits and destroys one faculty limits and destroys all. We are poor

because we are blind. Whatever our outward material possessions may be, there is a deep poverty within. In the midst of outward abundance there is leanness of soul. In the Father's house there is bread enough and to spare, but the soul of the sinner perishes of hunger. There is a deeper poverty than that of outward condition, because life has possessions more precious than houses and lands, goods and gold. Poor is the heart that has no heavenly love; poor is the mind that has no heavenly light; poor is the life that has no heavenly hope. It is such poverty that makes us truly destitute.

But though thus blind and poor, we should be unconscious of our blindness and poverty, if Jesus of Nazareth did not pass by and reveal to us the truth concerning our state. We should have had no sense of contrast in our darkness, if the true light did not shine into our hearts; and in our poverty, if the unsearchable riches of Christ Jesus were not disclosed to us. It is only when the Spirit brings the heavenly light to bear upon us, and brings the heavenly wealth within our reach, that we are convinced of our blindness and poverty. Without this we should be self-satisfied, solacing ourselves with our clearness of vision and our sufficiency of goodness. When once it is proved to us that our boasted clear-sightedness is blindness, and our cherished treasure a delusion, then, like the blind beggar, we too must cry out, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy upon us!"

Bartimeus not only overcame the obstacles which the crowd placed in the way of his coming to Jesus, he also overcame the personal obstacle which his own loose-flowing garment interposed. But we find it much easier to overcome outward difficulties which come between us and Christ than the inward difficulties which exist in ourselves. We can break through the roof, like the friends who carried the man sick of the palsy, to get to the feet of Jesus ; we can leap over every wall of difficulty and push through every opposing host ; we can say to our enemies and ungodly companions and mistaken friends, " Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way " ; we may come to church and prayer-meeting and every ordinance of grace where Christ may be found ; but although we do all this, we do not find it easy to get clear of the last hindrance that stands in the way of our being saved by Jesus. Even though convinced of our blindness and poverty, and that Jesus of Nazareth is by our side waiting to cure our blindness and enrich our poverty, we are not ready to come to Him in the simplicity of our need. Though our prayer be ever so fervent that we may receive our sight, we do not cast away at once the garment of our self-righteousness. We cling, indeed, with more desperate eagerness to our filthy rags the more we realise that this is all we have, dreading to be unclothed in the presence of God. Like Peter, we gird our fisher's coat about us more closely when we come to Jesus, knowing that

we are naked. Every man thinks that he has whereof to boast—his acts of worship or kindness, his upright character and goodness of heart. There is hardly any one so low down in the world but he flatters himself that he has some merit to fall back upon, some redeeming virtue, some good memory of the past or hope of the future. It is very painful for the man who has known better days to be reduced to poverty and dependence, to be made familiar with want and the slights which want meets with among men. Such a man would do anything to conceal the shame of his poverty ; and it is inexpressibly bitter to him to have to show it, to be obliged to beg for alms from his fellowmen. And so, too, it is very humbling to the proud self-righteous soul to sue for alms from God, to realise its deplorable poverty and helplessness. It would fight against this feeling as long as possible. It would cling to every shred of its own merit to the last. It would strive to the uttermost to keep up appearances ; to cover its nakedness with the fig leaves of a religious profession, however unreal.

Naaman found it hard to give up his confidence in himself and in his great resources as the ruler of Syria. He wished to be cured as he was, sitting in his magnificent chariot, with all the pomp of his numerous retinue and rich presents. He would not condescend to the prophet's simple method of cure —go down from his chariot, leave his splendour behind, strip himself of his princely robes, and simply

as a naked beggar, having nothing but his humanity and his disease, wash seven times in the Jordan. His pride revolted against such humbling conditions; and thus while he overcame all the great initial difficulties connected with leaving his home and business and native land, and seeking out the prophet of Israel in the country of his hereditary foes, he stuck at the last, and apparently the least, difficulty; and had not his servants persuaded him he would have returned back in all his pomp, angry and uncured. And so the difficulty of casting away the beggar's coat, and coming to Jesus simply as naked, destitute sinners, having nothing but our sin, is the last, and, while seemingly the least, is in reality the most formidable one.

It is so difficult for us to realise that it is not necessary to array ourselves in a special dress in order to be welcomed by our Saviour; for it is not our outward clothing but our bare necessity, our blindness and poverty, that He recognises. We are slow of heart to believe that God does not ask some valuable consideration at our hands, and that if we would seek His blessing it is not necessary for us to be furnished with some price or equivalent to give. We have our creeds, our privileges, our charities, which we think will propitiate Him; and we exact from ourselves certain spiritual qualifications as a preparation. But if we are to be cured of our blindness and poverty we must fling this garment aside. We must be brought to believe that we do

not believe. We must hide our poverty no longer from ourselves. We must honestly and humbly take the beggar's place and raise the beggar's cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." When thus, not the mere fact of spiritual blindness and poverty is proved to us, but the spirit and the sense of spiritual blindness and poverty are inwrought in us; when we feel ourselves indeed to be poor and miserable and blind and naked, then the grace of God will meet us in our low condition and condescend to our humblest necessities. Stripped naked, Jesus clothes us with His own righteousness. Into the heart made vacant to receive it, heaven comes down in all its wealth.

And it is one of the surest proofs that we are already in a state of grace when we have thus consented to cast away our garment of self-righteousness, and to acknowledge our spiritual destitution. For just as in the natural world, it is only when we are beginning to get well from an illness that we feel our great weakness, and only when we are possessed of some knowledge that we realise our great ignorance, so it is in spiritual things. We must begin to be something before we can be conscious of our own nothingness. It is only when we begin to see that we understand how blind we are. It is only when we have got some small share of the heavenly wealth that we realise our poverty. The dead, dark soul has no sense of contrast, and is therefore insensible to its own condition. We are indeed clothed already with the righteousness of Christ when we

consent to cast away our filthy garments. We believe already when we cry, "Lord, help our unbelief." To feel poor is already the proof that the kingdom of heaven is ours. It is a living process that we are passing through. And the old sordid garments of pride and self-sufficiency which we wrapped more closely around us in the cold, dark days of our spiritual poverty, we now cast away in the warm, bright days of heavenly faith and love, as the buds of holy feeling are expanding in our hearts.

2. But I pass on to consider, in the second place, the necessity of casting away the garment of effete forms and methods in order to grow in knowledge and grace. Religion itself is often made a hindrance in the way of coming nearer to Christ. The Apostle commanded the Hebrew Christians to lay aside every weight, and the sin that did so easily beset them, in order to run with patience the race set before them in the Gospel. The besetting sin, the hindering weight of these Hebrew Christians was an intense devotion to the religion of their fathers, and to the grand old ceremonial worship of the temple. It was that which hindered the free growth of their faith in the Gospel and their unreserved devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. Severed from the Levitical institutions, they were afraid that they should be left naked altogether, cast out into the cold shivering atmosphere of a faithless world. They had not realised that the Jewish religion, though once ordained of God, had served its purpose, and

must no longer, by its ceremonial bondage, be allowed to restrain the freedom or circumscribe the life of their souls. As the man grows out of the clothes of the boy, so must they cast away and grow out of the beggarly elements that had once, at a more primitive stage, formed the appropriate garment of their religion, and dress themselves in the spotless robe of Christ's righteousness—the righteousness not of the law but of faith.

And are there not persons among us whose besetting sin, whose hindering weight, is just their attachment to the mere ceremonial forms of religion, who cling desperately to every shred of the old garment that has been handed down to them with the wear and tear and the dust of ages; believing that the essential realities of religion will be lost if these old forms are altered in the least degree, and they shall be left naked and destitute? Such persons must learn to cast away, if necessary, all such forms of godliness if they would seek to know more of Jesus, to imbibe more of His Spirit, and learn more of His ways. Let them not make the forms of religion hindrances to their realisation of the truth and substance of religion. The methods of worship, the forms of church organisation, are, after all, but a garment; and the garment is only an outward, temporal, accidental thing, necessary to the conserving of the vital warmth of religion, and the expression of its life and activity, and therefore may be modified from time to time, as the development

of life and circumstances require, and even cast away in a large measure when it has become effete, and threatens to become a hindrance and not a help. The body, it must always be remembered, is more than raiment.

It should be in grace as in nature. What would happen if, when the warm quickening sun of spring is calling every living thing to new growth and development, the buds of the trees persisted in retaining the scales in which they were wrapped up, merely because they had been indispensable in preserving their vitality during the winter's frosts and storms? There would be no foliage, no blossom or fruit, no formation of new wood for man's use, no shade for the earth and its creatures. The whole economy of nature would suffer grievous loss and be deranged. Nay, more, the arrested buds themselves would either die into hard knotty excrescences, or would be transformed into formidable thorns. And so, if we persist in retaining the old effete wrappings of religion merely because they were at an earlier stage of growth indispensable, when the summer sun of a higher faith is quickening us and calling us to a fuller Christian life, we shall become mere dry sticks in the vineyard of the Lord, providing no shade or fruit or beauty for ourselves or others. We shall derange the whole economy of the Church by our deadness and conservatism; and our arrested growth will be transformed into a wounding thorn. It is the law of grace, as it is of nature, that

there must be a discarding of the old when the new is formed, of the garment for the growing body, of the withered chaff for the full corn in the ear. Even evergreen trees, that seem always the same, exhibit brightening shoots in spring, and change their leaves season by season, though in a more secret and gradual way.

And so, while the essential truths of religion are unchangeable, the forms in which these truths are arrayed must from time to time have a power of change and adaptation, of expansion and modification, necessary to their continued vitality, else they will become mere mummies, and while the form is retained, the spirit will have departed. Change is the grand *conservative* principle in nature, giving continually the freshness of life. Where it does not operate, death reigns. And every thoughtful mind must be struck with God's method of development in the history of the dispensations, whereby the old grows into the new, and the Church roots itself deeper in the soil, and spreads its foliage more widely in the air, while much belonging to it that seemed sacred and essential at the time has fallen off and disappeared. The kingdom of heaven on earth is indeed like the growth of a mustard tree, producing new growths by the discarding of old; and when the foliage and blossom of one dispensation after another have served their purpose and decayed, the principle of life within takes new forms more adapted to the times, and maintains through all

changes the identity of the organism. Let the Church as well as the individual, then, act as Bartimeus did, cast away its beggar's coat of devotion to the merely temporary and subservient elements of religion, if it would come into nearer relations and more vital fellowship with Jesus; if it would be cured of its intellectual and spiritual blindness, and have its poverty enriched with the unsearchable riches of Christ Jesus; if it would follow its Lord in the path of the just, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

3. Let us look very briefly in closing at the necessity of casting away in the end the garment of the body by death, in order to be present with the Lord, and to be effectually cured of all our poverty and blindness. All nature is deciduous. The bud casts off its scales in order to produce the foliage; the flower casts off its petals in order to produce the fruit; the fruit decays in order to liberate the seed; the seed dies in order that the germ may grow. The worm leaves behind its silken tomb in order to emerge a butterfly. And at every stage of advancing life some old garment that suited an old purpose is cast away. So we cast away our body every seventh year in order to grow and mature our physical nature. And in the end we must cast away our body itself in order to finish our development and emerge into ampler life. To grow forever is our aim and ideal. The time comes for all of us when the body, by its infirmities and decays, limits our powers

and obscures our view, and there can be no more progress. Everything becomes familiar and stereotyped. And death comes to take away the garment of the flesh which hindered our advancement, and to introduce us into a larger and brighter world.

As the growth of the young foliage of spring from the cast-off husks of autumn is a process of life and not of death, so in the expansion of the soul through the casting off of the body, death loses all the elements which make it death. It is a process of life and development—in the harmony, and not out of the harmony, of the Divine order. As at present constituted, we could not live in the unveiled glory of heaven. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. We need, therefore, to be unclothed as regards this mortal flesh, with all its weakness and corruption, and clothed upon with an immortal nature fitted for the mansions of the Father's house. And there our blindness will be completely cured, and in God's light we shall see light clearly; our poverty will be completely removed, for we shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. A higher miracle than that wrought upon Bartimeus will be performed upon us; and what this world under the bright sunshine was to him when his eyes were couched of their films, and he saw the glory of Nature for the first time, this in a far grander form will be the heavenly world that shall burst upon our purified vision, and we shall see the glorious form of Jesus in the light in which He dwells, and we shall

be changed into the same image. Let us cast aside, therefore, every garment that would hinder us from coming to Christ here and now, that our blindness and poverty may be cured by Him; for our life hereafter is wrapped up in our present life, and what we are now, that shall we be hereafter in greater degree and with infinitely greater results, when the soul shall be again clothed upon with its bodily raiment, to be cast away no more.

IV

CROSS-BEARING

"And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross."—ST. MARK xv. 21.

WHEN Cyrus, the Persian king, conquered Palestine, he introduced into it several of the customs of his own country. One of the most remarkable of these was what might be called the postal service, which forwarded the messages of the government to all parts of the land. It was called the *Angareion*, from a Tartar word which means compulsory work without pay. Herodotus gives an interesting account of this custom; from which we learn that, in order to transmit messages with the utmost possible speed, relays of men and horses were kept ready at intervals along the principal roads, which handed on the despatches from one to another without pause or interruption, whatever might be the inclemency of the weather, and by night as well as by day. Such mounted couriers were further empowered to press into the service, should it be found necessary, additional men and

horses, even if they had to leave their own work in the field for the purpose; and boats, if they had to cross a river or an arm of the sea.

It can easily be imagined that such a system could be used by a government as an engine of oppression; and the people who were compelled to render this gratuitous service, often at very inconvenient times, and at great risk and loss to themselves, would doubtless feel very keenly the injustice of it. In Palestine it was greatly disliked, for, besides its own inherent evils, it had the additional one of being a foreign custom imposed upon a conquered people. The Tartar word for this disagreeable labour, having been introduced into the language of the Jews, came to be identified by them with every oppressive service. Our Lord used this peculiar word when He laid down the duty of self-denial and goodwill, even towards those who act oppressively towards us. "And whosoever shall compel thee"—as the mounted courier compels the farmers and labourers along the way to help him in forwarding the despatches of the government—"whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." And here in my text the word which is employed to denote the action of the Roman soldiers in compelling Simon the Cyrenian to carry the cross of Christ for Him, is the same word which was borrowed from the old postal service of Persia. The Romans, who too readily made their own any instrument of oppression which they found among

foreign nations, were familiar with the word, which crept into their own language, and with it the custom which it represented.

No more appropriate word could have been used. It gives a most picturesque and at the same time a most touching pathos to the occasion. It links this single act of tyranny with the whole gigantic system. The world has been familiar with forced labour from the earliest days. As far back as we can go in the sorrowful history of our race, we find the stronger tribes making slaves and beasts of burden of the weaker, and of those whom they conquered in war. The brickmaking of the Israelites, under the intolerable cruelty of which they groaned and died, was not by any means the first oppression in Egypt. Ages before that we find proofs of the reckless disregard of human life shown by the Pharaohs, compelling thousands, without wages or even food, to construct for them those enormous monuments, the ruins of which excite the astonishment of every traveller. Nor can any modern race lift up a stone against those ancient oppressors ; for there is no nation that has not been guilty of similar practices. Our own country cannot plead guiltless to the charge. It brought upon America and upon the West Indies the curse of slavery, which could only be removed by a tremendous sacrifice of blood and treasure. Within the memory of this generation men have been carried away from their homes and pursuits, and forced into the naval service of our country by the

ruthless press-gang. As the cross of Christ represented the sins of the whole world laid upon the Redeemer, it may be said therefore that that cross, laid upon the unwilling shoulders of Simon the Cyrenian, represented all the oppressive burdens which man has laid upon his fellowmen. It was the *Angareion* of the world.

We know very little about the victim of brutal power who was compelled to take part in the crucifixion of the Saviour. He was in all likelihood a proselyte who had come all the way from Africa to observe the Feast of the Passover at Jerusalem. He had, perhaps, never previously heard of Jesus of Nazareth, and was not thinking of Him at the time when he saw Him on the way to execution. Probably, instead of pitying the sad case of the Sufferer beside him, he was occupied with the hardship of his own case, and filled with resentment on account of the odious service so ruthlessly exacted of him, including even Jesus in his indiscriminate wrath. But forced, in spite of himself, to accompany our Lord to Calvary, bearing the hated cross, he was made a witness of all the memorable incidents of the transcendent tragedy that took place there. He saw the Divine meekness and patience of the Sufferer; he heard the wonderful words of love and pardoning mercy that flowed from His lips; he beheld the supernatural darkness gathering round the cross, and felt the ground trembling under his feet; and, dismayed by these awful portents he

heard the loud cry with which Jesus gave up the ghost. And when the darkness cleared away, he saw the centurion transfixed with awe before the central cross, glorifying God, and exclaiming, "Truly this was the Son of God." All this could not but have deeply impressed the mind of Simon. He must have learned enough in the brief companionship of a few hours with the Prince of Sufferers—in such unexampled circumstances — to change the current of his whole life. He must have been one of the first who were drawn to Christ when lifted up upon the cross in fulfilment of His own words. Coming to Jerusalem to keep the Passover, he found in the cross of Christ the true fulfilment of the great historical rite; he found in that dying life a perfect example, and in that death an atoning sacrifice.

And not only was he himself converted, but through him his whole family was won for Christ. For St. Mark speaks of his sons, Alexander and Rufus, as if they were well-known disciples of the Lord; and Paul, in his greetings to the Christians at Rome from Corinth, sends special words of love to Rufus and his mother, who had acted in a peculiarly tender and motherly manner to him: "Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." Some, too, have thought that Simeon, surnamed Niger, might be identified with the cross-bearer of Christ—for Simeon and Simon are the same name —and he is noticed with Lucius of Cyrene as one of the prophets and teachers in the church at

Antioch. If this were true, he would assume the new name of Christian, which we know originated in that city; and although he and his fellow disciples could foresee but little of the future glories of that name, they chose it as one that was to them above every name. Well might Simon extol the strange arrangement of providence which brought him to the place where he should meet Jesus, at the very time when they were leading Him out to be crucified. Well might he bless the rough violence of the Roman soldiers, who compelled him to bear the cross for his weary and fainting Master. The bondage of man proved to him the liberty of Christ; the shame of earth turned into the glory of heaven. How grateful must he have felt afterwards that he had this unique honour; that it was given to him to alleviate in some small degree the unparalleled sufferings of his adorable Redeemer—to share with Him the obloquy and the degradation of the cross. When he was afterwards called by the name of Christ at Antioch, he could indeed clothe himself with the shame of the cross as with a royal robe, and say with the great Apostle of the Gentiles, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Simon of Cyrene, the cross-bearer of Christ, was the firstfruits of Africa to Christianity. Eighteen centuries of Christian history have passed, and how little has been done to give the light and the liberty that have been won by the Cross to that enslaved

and benighted continent! But the Christian freedom which Simon found in his degrading bondage, may be regarded as the earnest and the guarantee that similar Christian freedom will be enjoyed by all in the dark land, who have been compelled by their fellow-creatures to carry the cross of toil and shame. The transportation of the slave to other countries, in a manner as providential as the coming of Simon to Jerusalem, has often been the means of bringing him within the reach of Christian influences, so that his bondage has proved to him life from the dead. In bearing his compulsory cross, he has heard of the Crucified One, and now knows Jesus of Nazareth as his own Redeemer, and the truth has made him free indeed. And so it will go on—until there shall be no compulsory labour under the sun, and every oppressed one shall enjoy the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Christianity has put its own higher meanings and purposes into the common language of men. The wild weeds brought into its garden, under the culture of grace, display a beauty and fruitfulness before unknown. The use of the *Angareion*, or compulsory service, of the Persians, is ennobled in the service of the Christian religion. Like the other Persian word "paradise," which signified originally a park or pleasure-garden, in which wild beasts were kept and beautiful foreign trees grew, but which our Lord employed to describe the blessed heavenly world into which the dying thief should be immediately

translated—"To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise"—so the original Persian word for "compel" is transformed by being used in connection with the cross-bearing of Christ. In this Divine usage it becomes the vehicle of far higher truth than any which it knew at first, and is divested of all its former disagreeable associations. The inhumanity of man becomes the salvation of Jesus Christ. Blessed are those who are compelled to bear the cross of Christ, for in so doing they are bearing the instrument of their own redemption; and the following of Christ that is at first enforced, that is done in pain and shame and toil, ends in walking with Him at liberty, running with enlargement of heart in the way of His commandments!

Many are compelled in this world of wrong and oppression to act the part of Simon. It is an every-day experience. Much of the work of the world is carried on in the way in which the ancient postal service of Persia was carried on—by enforced labour, by the strong oppressing the weak, and the rich the poor. Our Lord, by enacting a law regarding it in His Sermon on the Mount, shows how common it is. He speaks of a man being compelled to go a mile, as if this were a thing which His disciples might expect to be called upon to do at any time. Not, indeed, that the compulsory service might literally take that form at all times. That was only one illustration among many others. The compulsion in question would meet a man in many ways.

And our Lord showed how this pressed service was to be performed; what was the law of the heavenly kingdom regarding it. "Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." He does not counsel retaliation or revenge, but a spirit of self-denial and love. Love will prove itself stronger than force by voluntarily doing what force cannot make it do. Law will compel us to go a mile, but love, of its own large-hearted freewill, will induce a man to go twain. The law is founded upon the principle of repelling force by force; the essence of the Gospel is conquering by submission. Love submits to the compulsion of the violent brother, and thus teaches him the meekness and gentleness of love.

The man to whom our Lord alluded, who was compelled to go a mile, evidently some farmer or peasant who was called from his own employment and pressed into the service of the government by some courier, who, after the old Persian method, was passing by, carrying important despatches, might have resisted and refused to go. But the power of the government was greater than his, and he would be forced to go in spite of himself. But hard and oppressive as was the service, if a man, instead of resisting it, as he would be naturally disposed to do, meekly and patiently yielded, and did voluntarily, in the spirit of freedom and love, more than he was compelled to do—go of his own accord with the courier another mile beyond the first to bear his burden, and to cheer him on his way—this graceful

act would take away all the evil out of the compulsory service, and make it a moral benefit to himself and a means of good to his oppressor. The servile act would be glorified by the spirit of love and gentleness in which it was performed. He would feel that he was doing not the will of an imperious master, who impressed him, but the higher law of the land, carrying out the important work of the government; and such a thought would redeem the act from its degradation. But, above all, he would feel that he was doing this thing not as unto men but as unto the Lord. Such a man would emancipate himself from the bondage to which he was subjected; and his freeborn spirit, obeying the law of Christ, would rise high above the slavery of the outward obedience. In a similar way Simon could have transfigured the oppressive and hateful burden-bearing of the cross, on the way to Calvary, into a crucifixion with Him who was free and yet yielded Himself up unto death; who had all power in heaven and earth, and yet submitted meekly to be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and to be nailed to the accursed tree. In the complete sacrifice of himself, he would rise above the condition of an unwilling victim into the condition of one who made a freewill offering, and who therefore voluntarily yielded what no outward force could compel him to give.

This law of the kingdom is to be carried out in every cross-bearing which we have to endure. If

we bear it patiently we rob it of its sting, and convert it from a bane into a blessing. We make the thorn that wounds us to blossom and fruit for our good. We act as the freemen of Christ, who are forced by outward circumstances, but who yield their souls a living sacrifice, and whose acts are therefore priceless, free. We are perpetually meeting the Crucified One on the path of life. We are continually impressed into His service. We are compelled to go with Him a mile on the path of duty. We are commanded to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him along the straight and narrow way that leads to Gethsemane and Calvary. We are, it may be, in a situation where those about us are disagreeable, and the circumstances trying, and the duties unpleasant. We are tied down to a work which we dislike, while we are filled with longing for a work which we love; bound to some mechanical, inferior employment, while we feel within us faculties and aspirations for higher service. We are placed perhaps in homes which have no attraction or brightness for us, while we have visions of the Eden that might be ours if our circumstances were different. We are wronged, or maligned, or undervalued, or unloved, wrestling with care or sorrow or penury. We come in as it were from the country, like Simon the Cyrenian, thinking only of our own selfish pursuits and enjoyments, and at the straight gate of life, in some crisis of our history, we encounter the Crucified One, and life puts on to us

at once a painful aspect. Our holiday pleasure is spoiled, our plans are thwarted, and henceforth we have to gird ourselves for toilsome effort and patient endurance. The Saviour is thus constantly crossing our path, meeting us as He is said to have met Peter, in the beautiful legend of the Early Church, on the Appian Way, when he was fleeing from the persecution of Nero. "Lord, whither goest Thou?" said the trembling and awe-struck Apostle, as he saw his Master with His face and step steadfastly turned towards Rome. "I go back to Rome to be crucified a second time," was the reply; and the conscience-stricken Apostle, ashamed of his cowardice, went back at once to die with his Lord the martyr's death. Jesus is meeting us bearing His cross, and asking us to take it from Him, to help Him in the form of some hard duty, some painful self-denial, some humbling employment, some patient endurance of suffering or wrong.

Whatever form of cross-bearing is laid upon us, we feel at first that it is a pressed service, a compulsion which is trying and oppressive. We feel the pain of having to give up our own way and to have our liberty restricted. At first we are filled with resentment against the Gospel of Christ for spoiling our plans and pleasures. But by and by, as God's grace works in us and makes us willing, the service that we most hated we shall learn most to love. The cross that crushed us to the earth will support us and lift us to heaven. The things that

seemed against us we shall find working together for our good. The compulsion of painful circumstances that brought us to Christ will issue in richer life and grander liberty ; and the constrained service will be changed into a life-long fidelity. How thankful should we be to be brought into Christ's companionship, even if it be by the pressure of the heaviest cross that was ever laid upon human shoulders ! How thankful should we be that we may still carry Christ's cross for Him by being crucified in our own souls to the love of sin and the world ; by bearing our own sufferings patiently and meekly, and thus knowing the fellowship of His sufferings ; by sharing with Him His love for the souls of men and His keen solicitude for their everlasting salvation, undertaking the heavy labours connected with the preaching of the Cross, and enduring, in full sympathy with Him, continual sorrow of heart because of the sins and pains of the ungodly !

Who talks of compulsion in such a service ? "Compel them to come in" was indeed Christ's command to the servant who was sent out to the highways and hedges to collect the outcasts to the feast of joy. We need, it is true, compulsion in regard to the things we are unconsciously longing most for. We need the terrors of the law to arouse our consciences and awaken our fears and drive us to Christ, our only refuge and hope. We need trials and losses and sufferings to show to us the value of eternal things, to which we are so lament-

ably insensible when all goes well with us. And it may be that poor and needy souls may deem themselves unworthy of the invitation—hardly imagining that it can be intended for them—and may therefore require earnest persuasion and a certain constraint to induce them to avail themselves of the rich provision of grace. But once satisfied with the goodness of Christ, once engaged in His service, once helping Him to carry His cross, the love of Christ makes all service a willing service, all sacrifice a living sacrifice. We are obeying the instincts of our own hearts in the help we are giving to the Lord. All our service grows naturally and spontaneously not out of the root of law but of love. It is like the tender ministries of an affectionate home—like the loving services which father and mother and children and brothers and sisters render to each other—in which no claim on the one side or obligation upon the other is urged or felt save love. Who grudges acts of devotion to a mother? What mother would feel the sacrifice of tending a sick child? Love lives on service and sacrifice; and the Lord, by calling upon His children to carry His cross for Him, to do Him some self-denying service, meets with a glad response. It is not the burdens which God lays upon us that are the hardest to bear, but the burdens which we lay upon ourselves by our follies and sins. If we are God's cross-bearers we shall obtain a strength and an endurance that are not our own; and while in the world we

have tribulation, we have an inward peace which sustains us and makes our presence a benediction wherever we go.

We cannot, indeed, in one sense help Christ to bear His cross. Our sufferings, our merits will not be allowed to compete for a single moment with His infinite atonement. In the sense in which we need Him as our Saviour from sin, He stands alone—in an awful supremacy of suffering and in a glorious supremacy of grace. He has trodden the wine-press alone ; and of the people there were none with Him. And He might have carried on the work of grace which He thus inaugurated unaided, as He finished the work of creation without help of man or angel. Who are we, and what is our power of service? We are dismayed and disheartened when we think how little we can do in contrast with the magnitude of the work. And yet one of the deepest things in Scripture is the assurance that God has need of us—that He cannot carry on His work of salvation without us. Not more truly did Simon the Cyrenian help Jesus to carry His cross on Calvary than we can help Him still in making that cross efficacious in healing the sins and sorrows of the world. The cross is ours as well as Christ's. There is a Divine necessity laid upon us. We are under Divine compulsion to carry the cross of Christ into the heart of the world's sufferings—to bring its soothing and elevating and healing power to bear upon the case of those who feel life's burdens too

wretched to be borne. The love of Christ constrains us. By the irresistible power of that love which even the cross itself has left unexhausted, let us help the Lord to bear the burden of the world's misery; and by bearing it, to bear it away, and so end it for ever. And assuredly we shall find that such gracious compulsion is our grandest freedom and expansion of soul; and such love-constrained service the highest blessedness of man. And whatever be the cross we ourselves may have to bear—and life for each of us is full of crosses—cross purposes, cross callings, cross relationships, cross necessities, cross circumstances and issues of life—let us seek to carry our cross for the sake and in the Spirit of Christ, as the divinely-appointed means by which we are to be crucified with Him to the world and the world to us. And however long it may remain, and however hard it may press, we shall assuredly realise the truth of Christ's own words, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." If we take up the cross of others, our own cross will fall; and if we take up our own cross and follow Christ, our sorrow will be turned into joy. The cross will crown us; and our bondage will make us free.

V

GROWTH UNDER PRESSURE

"Cast down, but not destroyed."—2 Cor. iv. 9.

"*SUB pondere cresco*"—I grow under a weight—was the motto on the crest of John Spreull of Glasgow, who for his defence of religious liberty in the times of Claverhouse was imprisoned on the Bass Rock, in the Firth of Forth. This is the great motto of the world. Nature is like a huge watch, whose movements are caused by the compression of the mainspring. Only by restraint is life possible. The forms of all living things, from the smallest moss to man himself, are determined by the extent and degree to which the force of life overcomes the dead forces of nature. The simple principle of growth under limitation will account for the shape of every leaf, and the formation of every organ of the human body; for the germination of a seed, and for the beating of the heart within the breast.

In early May you have seen in the woods the curled top of a young fern just appearing above the ground, like the richly-ornamented head of a bishop's crozier. That rolled-up shape is due to the fact

that the central part of the young fern is growing while the ends are fixed. As the plant grows it becomes free, and unfolds. The same cause accounts for the convolutions of the human brain. Its form is due to the pressure arising from its increase under limitation. As it expands beneath the resisting dome of the bony skull, it is folded into these convolutions for want of space. The blossom of a plant is produced by growth under restraint. At the point farthest away from the root the vital forces are weakest, and the supply of nourishment almost exhausted; and therefore the ordinary leaves are compressed by their diminished power of resistance to the forces to which they are subjected, and modified into the strange shapes, and changed into the beautiful colours, of the flower. The compression goes on farther in the interior parts of the flower, according as the resisting power becomes less, until at last, in the innermost central part, the forces are brought to an equilibrium, and the plant finds rest in the round seed, which is simply the most complete compression of which the leaves are capable. The head of man is in the same way only a modification of the vertebral column, and his brain a compression of the spinal marrow, by the mechanical conditions under which they are developed.

Have you ever watched a bubble of air rising up from the bottom of a clear pond to the top. If so, you cannot fail to have noticed that it ascends not in a straight line, but in a corkscrew or spiral form.

The force which draws it upwards to rejoin the native air from which it has been separated would do so, if left to itself, by the shortest course; but it encounters continually the resistance of the denser element of the water, and this pressure delays its ascent through it, and makes it take a longer zig-zag path. If you understand the reason of this simple phenomenon, you will understand the way in which every herb and tree grow in the air, and why their shapes are what we see them to be. They all grow in the most varied and complicated spiral forms because they grow under resistance. This is the simple method of Nature's working, the law which determines all her forms.

The same law obtains throughout the spiritual world. There, too, growth is under resistance. The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus contends against the law of sin and death; the law in the members wars against the law of the mind. The most essential character of spiritual life is that it depends upon the resistance of one form of moral force by another: its tension is holiness, righteousness, self-control. We grow in grace as the trees grow in space, under limitations; and the various forms and degrees of spiritual life which men exhibit are due to the extent of these limitations. Spiritual life does not assume one stereotyped pattern. The Pharisees of religion have always endeavoured to cast it into one mould—to prune all the trees of the Lord into pollards. In this happily they have not

succeeded. The individuality of men and the circumstances of life have been too strong for them; and human beings have developed spiritually as they have developed naturally, according to the sum of the forces that have been brought to bear upon them. There is the same infinite variety in the spiritual world that there is in the natural, arising from similar causes. As no two plants grow in precisely similar circumstances, so no two human beings are exposed to the same spiritual influences. Have you ever looked attentively at the leaf of a strawberry, which consists of three leaflets? If so, you have noticed that while the central one is fully unfolded, the two side ones are imperfectly developed; the upper half of each being smaller than the lower, as if it had been clipped. Well, here are three leaflets placed as nearly as possible in the same circumstances, and yet they differ from one another in shape; and the difference of shape is owing to the fact that the conditions under which they are grown are in reality different—that their exposure to air and light, and the pressure exerted upon them by the adjacent parts, are different. And so in the human world no two members of the same family, brought up in what we believe to be the same circumstances, and exposed to the same religious influences, exhibit the same form of religious life; showing that in reality not only is there a different original bent of nature, a different temperament to begin with, but also a

real difference in the apparent identity of the conditions under which they grow.

If you look narrowly at a common pine tree, which is the most symmetrical of all trees, which seems to be but a repetition of similar parts, you will notice that there is a considerable difference in shape between the lowest branches, which are the oldest, and the higher ones, which are the youngest. The branches at the top grow vertically round the leading shoot; the ones at the foot spread out horizontally around the trunk; and there are various modifications of the two modes of growth, according to the position of the branches in the tree from the bottom to the top. All these modifications of shape are owing to the different amounts of space and light in which the branches grow. And if the variety be so great in a tree that looks so regular and uniform as a pine or fir, need we wonder that in the same church, in the same congregation, nay, in the same family, where the conditions of spiritual growth seem precisely the same, the variety of its forms should nevertheless be so great. And thus, by this simple law in the spiritual world as in the natural, the law of growth under pressure, God has produced that wonderful variety of Christian character and experience, which strikes us as much in the kingdom of heaven as in the field of nature, and which is one of the most powerful factors in human progress.

Of course there can be no growth without life.

If the soul has no resisting power within, then the forces of the world without simply destroy it. If the soul is dead, all things deepen its death. But if it has spiritual life, then all things help to maintain and develop it. Like the sailing boat that tacks to the wind, it takes advantage even of the contrary currents of life to reach its end. We may compare the soul that is dead and the soul that has spiritual life to two seeds, one infertile and the other fertile. The forces of nature play upon both seeds in the same way. In the case of the seed that has no life in it, these forces are unresisted; they have their own way, and they proceed to corrupt or break up the elements of which it is composed, until nothing of it remains. In the case of the seed that is possessed of life the forces of nature are resisted, and this resistance becomes the source of living action, the very power of growth. The changes which the seed undergoes in germinating under the influence of those forces, duly controlled, form the basis of all the subsequent developments. And like these two seeds are dead and living souls. If the soul is dead, it yields helplessly to the corruption that is in the world through lust; if the soul is living, it resists these disintegrating forces of the world, and uses them to increase its spiritual life and to build up its spiritual structure.

It is only, therefore, of those who have spiritual life in themselves that it can be said that, though "cast down, they are not destroyed." To such,

justification is a living doctrine, not merely part of a formal creed or an intellectual abstraction. Their faith is alive, and can prove its vitality by its energy. It is the vital act of the Spirit by which the soul enters into real living union with Christ, and becomes partaker of His spiritual and eternal life. Faith is the conquering principle in common life as well as in religion ; and Christian faith is only the daily faith by which we live, exercising itself upon the highest possible subjects. And the force of this life is remarkable. This faith can overcome the world. It can rise superior to all its temptations and trials. The force of natural life even in the lowest forms is extraordinary. The soft cellular mushroom has been known to lift up heavy masses of pavement by its expansion beneath them ; the tender root of a tree insinuating itself into a crevice of the rock splits it up by its growth. The mechanical resistance yields when the vital force reaches a proportionate amount. And if life in its feeblest form can do such wonderful things, what may not be expected from spiritual and eternal life? The life that is in Christ Jesus by mere formality and profession is like a dead branch that is merely mechanically united to the tree, and which, destitute of the tree's vital sap and force, yields inevitably to the forces of nature, decays and drops off into dust and ashes. But the life that is in Him by faith is like a living branch that becomes partaker of the whole force of the tree, and grows with its growth, and flourishes with its strength and

beauty. "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." It grows strong by opposition; it flourishes in the most adverse circumstances; it uses all the conditions of life for its maintenance; it makes even its hindrances to advance its life-work. Let us believe in Christ, and we rise above the world; we have that heroic perseverance which refuses to own itself beaten. It may be overcome again and again, but it finally exhausts the force that is merely earthly and temporal. "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed."

What casts us down most of all is the burden of sin. In the unrenewed heart this burden is unfelt. We are unconscious of the enormous pressure of the atmosphere upon us, because our bodies are pervaded with air which counterbalances the superincumbent air. But were the air within us removed, the pressure of the air without would crush us. And so being sinful ourselves we are unconscious of the weight of sin. But when the love of sin is taken away, then sin becomes a burden which is too heavy to bear. We feel ourselves like Christian in the *Pilgrim's Progress* with his huge bundle upon his back. This pressure of sin has drawn tears from eyes which would have looked unmoved upon the martyr's fire. There is nothing on earth so terrible. It made Paul when he was converted grope for the light in fasting and darkness for three miserable

days at Damascus; and at the close of his life it made him cry out, "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" What evil can we bewail that deserves a thought compared with sin? Bunyan, when he came to the knowledge of the truth, remarked that nothing amazed him so much as to see how men were affected with their temporal experiences and troubles. "These," he says, "have no power now to interest me; all my concern is absorbed in something infinitely more worthy—What must I do to be saved?" Sin is indeed the only thing that is truly hostile to us; and yet in contending with it, we can use it as a fulcrum to remove the obstacles that lie in the soul's upward path.

But though this great adversity be taken away by faith in Christ, other evils are not taken away, for that would be to take away what determines the strength and shape of the spiritual life. The Christian is not exempt from ordinary troubles. In the world he has tribulation; and many are the afflictions of the righteous. In addition to the ordinary trials of all men, he has troubles of his own that are peculiar to the spiritual life. And these are felt most in proportion to the strength and vigour of the spiritual life; only that in his case what crushes others proves a means of growth, calls forth, exercises, and educates all the powers of his soul, and brings down the powers of the world to come to shape his character and conduct. Some-

times, indeed, the weight is too much. There are many of God's people who are so cast down by their circumstances that they seem almost destroyed. The burden of life is so heavy that it almost crushes them to the earth, and prevents their looking up. They are like a tuft of grass growing under a stone. The stone does not destroy the grass, or prevent it from growing, for the vital force is stronger than the mechanical; but it dwarfs and distorts it; it blanches its colour and it deforms its shape, so that in the mass of pale and twisted stems and leaves exposed to view when the stone is turned over, it would be difficult to see any resemblance to the graceful green tufts of grass growing freely in the meadow around. Thus many lives are prevented from being what they might otherwise have been by the crushing circumstances of life.

Poverty often lies like a stone upon them. The sordid care for things that perish in the using seems to dwarf the immortal nature to the level of these things—seems to make the soaring spirit a part of the dull material world. The toil that is needed to support the body leaves little time or inclination for the cultivation of the soul. What roughens the hand and stiffens the back is not favourable for the refinements of life. The "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" is a pathetic lamentation of the waste of human energy caused by outward circumstances. Chill penury repressed the noble rage of those who slept unknown underneath those green mounds. But

where there is a strong vital nature, when the soul is quickened by heavenly impulses, outward poverty, instead of repressing, only braces it. God can say regarding such a nature, "I know thy poverty (but thou art rich)." Its poverty is like the surface barrenness of the mine, which is always in the bleakest and most desolate scenery, but contains beneath the fine gold or the precious diamond. Though poor in itself, it can make many rich. It is when the plant is poorest in material and most limited in force, that it produces the blossom and the fruit, by which the world is adorned with beauty, and the generations of living creatures are fed. And so the poverty of the Christian may blossom and fruit for others. How often has this been the case in the history of the world. It is to its poor men that the world owes most. It is the poor in the Church who have left behind the most noble examples and the most valuable legacies of Christian experience. Few of the world's greatest benefactors have had worldly advantages. The inventions and discoveries that have been of the greatest use to society have been made by persons who had little wealth.

It is an axiom in nature that motion takes the direction of least resistance. Poverty, therefore, must be eminently helpful to the growth of the soul, inasmuch as it removes many of the hindrances which make it hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. If the aspiration of the soul is heavenward, then a poor man encounters less opposition

in that aspiration from his circumstances, than one who is rich and increased with goods. He is relieved of the weight of worldliness—of those cares and anxieties which oppress the soul and give it an earthward tendency. Wealth means dependence upon others; gold is only the purchasable aid of other men. A rich man, therefore, is one who to the extent of his riches leans upon his fellow-creatures, and to that extent he is poor in himself. We do not say that a man is learned because he possesses an extensive library, which he may never consult, but because his mind has been highly cultured and richly stored with knowledge. And so we cannot say, in the true sense, that a man is rich merely because he possesses great wealth, which enables him to make a claim upon the labour of others; but because he can help himself and provide for his own wants. Riches, in this sense, is a confession of weakness and poverty; poverty is true independence. The principle of self-help is the best element in the formation of the Christian character. It saves so much of the waste of life. What an amount of fever and hurry it would take out of life if persons were more anxious to develop the wealth that is in themselves, than to accumulate riches which are only the aid of other men; and which, to the extent that we avail ourselves of it, weakens and impoverishes instead of strengthening and enriching us. It is not in what we have, but in what we can do without, and most of all in what

we are, that we are truly rich. And limiting our own wants, we shall not only grow more freely in the Divine life, but we shall be more able to relieve the wants of others ; and the Apostle's paradox will be fulfilled,—though poor, we shall be able to make many rich. We shall be able to give personal service with love, which is far better than to purchase the service of others without love.

Sorrow is the commonest of all pressures that cast down the soul. This experience belongs to no class or condition of life exclusively. It is shared some time or other by all human beings, in virtue of their humanity. "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." It is the law of his being. Through suffering he enters into life, and in suffering he passes out of it. And in all the successive acts or states of his being the same law holds good. There is sorrow enough in life for all of us, however guarded may be our lot ; and those who have the keenest sense of its higher aims and objects find life saddest. Its pathos is inexpressible, and increases as the years go on. So much of its suffering seems needless. We can conceive of men being perfected without suffering, like the angels ; and often, when we are passing through some sore experience, we have been tempted to feel as if the sorrow were too much. It is the great mystery of Providence that there should be such an immense amount of pain, and much of it, too, without apparent personal cause. But the greatness of our

sorrow is owing to the greatness of our nature. "The highest mountains cast the largest shadows; and so the dark, wide shadows of human experience witness to the original loftiness of our being." Sorrow gives a noble touch to the humblest individual. It lifts him out of the petty incidents and surroundings of daily life into a higher world, confronts him directly with the thoughts of God, and inspires him with a sense of the sacredness of his being and the grandeur of his destiny.

God has ordered that sorrow should be the most powerful factor in the education of our race. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" That was the law of Christ's life, and it is the law of ours. That Christ, though holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, should nevertheless be the Man of Sorrows, makes sorrow sacred, and associates it with the discipline of a Heavenly Father, and with the training of a blessed and glorious life. In the histories of the patriarchs and saints we see how suffering, deep and long-continued, ministered to a noble development. We see the baser earthy element in them crystallised into the purity and transparency of heaven through the fires of pain and sorrow. And we see the mysterious process completed in Him who Himself was made perfect through suffering, and entered into His glory —not the glory which belonged to Him in virtue of His essential Godhead, but a glory far more significant to us—the glory which grew out of all that He

willingly suffered, in order that, through the fellowship of His sufferings, He might present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Why should a living man complain, when his true life-work passes beyond all the limitations of its circumstances? Why should a living man complain, when the sufferings of his earthly life are the very means by which he is redeemed from its evils? If the ordeal of sorrow brings to light the noblest traits of a man's character—unflinching faith, self-denying patience, pitying tenderness—then what matters the anguish of the moment, what matters even the halting all his days, as one sore wounded in the battle of life! If our trouble, instead of shutting us up in it, and making us morbidly exaggerate it, until we become peevish and selfish, expands and opens, like the frost of winter, the soil of our hearts, and makes it ready to receive the seeds of charity, and we become more tender and sympathetic towards our suffering neighbour at our side, then sorrow becomes to us, indeed, an inverse aid to progress.

The crest of John Spreull was a palm tree, with two weights hanging on each side of it from its fronds, and yet maintaining, in spite of this heavy down-dragging force, its upright position, carrying its graceful crown of foliage up into the serene air. The weights in the case of this sufferer for righteousness' sake were visible. His cross of imprisonment and martyrdom was apparent to every one. And very many of the weights that press down the

Christian life are equally visible and palpable. But as the palm tree is pressed on every side by the viewless air, as it is exposed to the resistance of forces which the eye cannot see nor the hand feel, so the heaviest weights which drag down the Christian life are often invisible. Its crosses cannot be displayed. No stranger can intermeddle with its sorrows. Many of its troubles are of a spiritual nature. It is cast down, not by circumstances, but by the state of the soul. It is in the inward man—"the hidden man of the heart"—that it suffers. And these spiritual sorrows are the evidences of the reality of the work of grace; for where there is the principle of life there must be the changes of life. The form of godliness is a dead, invariable thing; whereas the power of godliness has its winter, its summer, and its autumn states. Sorrow arises in the case of most believers from inability to realise their ideal, to reach the mark of attainment they have set themselves. They build their trust upon the ground of their Christian experience, and as this varies with their varying frames and feelings, they are frequently cast down. They have sorrow because of the remembrance of past sins and shortcomings; they have sorrow because of the consciousness of a thousand deficiencies and infirmities within them, a consciousness which becomes more susceptible the more they grow in grace and see of the infinite excellence of the Saviour. They have sorrow because of the sins of the world. All

this is the godly sorrow that worketh repentance unto life. But in this winter state the spiritual life is collecting and concentrating itself for renewed effort when the spring of revival is come. It waits upon the Lord, and so renews its strength; upon Him who has revealed His tender and patient love in the life and cross of His Son. And so the very peace of God Himself, flowing into the soul which holds patient fellowship with Him, hushes its restlessness, and fills it with quiet energy and resolute faith.

No life can grow or support itself in the void by its spontaneous buoyancy. All life upholds itself in the air by continuous effort. The humblest life is a vortex of unceasing forces. The various substances of a growing plant are in a state of constant change, owing to the destructive action of the air and the constructive action of the light; and the condition of each part at all seasons of the year and under different circumstances depends upon and expresses the temporary or more permanent equilibrium between these two opposing forces. Much more is this the case in regard to the highest life of the soul—the life that is breathed into us by God's Spirit and formed by faith in Christ Jesus. It has ever to do an uphill work. It has to grow against the gravitation of sin. It has to exert itself against the weariness of the flesh and the heaviness of the soul. It has to push up like Sisyphus the stone of endeavour to the top of the hill, notwithstanding that it rolls down again and again.

But this resistance is meant to bring out all that

is best in us, to stimulate our most strenuous exertions, to cultivate our patience, to educate our faith and hope, to mould us after the Divine pattern. It is the weight of the architrave upon the pillar that gives it stability and endurance; and it is the fightings without and the fears within that give strength to the character and perseverance to the life. What a beauty and grace does the spiritual life take from the pressure of the light afflictions that are but for a moment, and that work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory! The capital of the Corinthian pillar, the loveliest of all the styles of architecture, derived its origin from a basket of offerings placed upon a child's grave, and covered with a tile to protect it from the birds. The basket stood upon the root of an acanthus, a species of thistle, and the plant grew and spread its leaves around it in the most graceful manner, thus suggesting to a passing artist the form of the Corinthian capital. And so the pressure of earth's troubles causes the spiritual life to develop around them its fairest forms; and thus it is crowned with its appropriate capital. The thorny sorrow that springs from the grave of some dead love or hope forms the richest adornment of life. Not only is the outward form of the Christian life moulded into shapes of moral beauty—into whatsoever things are pure, and honest, and lovely, and of good report,—but its inner substance is also made more lovely by the pressure of external shocks and internal sufferings. It is not

the tree that grows in rich soil and in a sheltered situation that produces the richly-grained wood, which is selected to adorn our finest furniture; but the tree that is exposed in its bleak, shelterless situation to every storm of heaven. The wild forces that beat upon it, and which it successfully overcomes, develop in it the beautiful veins and markings which are so highly prized by man. And so, it is not when growing up in luxurious ease and comfort that we produce the gifts and graces which enrich and ennoble the Christian life. The natures that have the richest variety and the greatest interest are ever those which have grown under pressure of suffering, and by a vital faith have overcome the world.

The Apostle Paul is an illustrious example of the law in question. His growth in grace was indeed under pressure of the most trying outward circumstances, and yet what a marvellous fulness and variety of form did it display! No man was more many-sided in his Christian attainments; no man realised more of the length and breadth and height and depth of the love that passeth knowledge, or exhibited to the world more of the fulness of God with which he was filled. Whether we look at his deep insight into the mystery of the Gospel, or his catholic conception of the application of Christian faith to all the acts and relations of life, we feel that he could not have developed this wide human sympathy and spiritual culture had he not touched human life at so many points, had he not passed through the

most opposite experiences, and gathered from each what fitted him for his great work.

Let us be followers of him, as he was a follower of the Lord Jesus, and learn as he did that the things that seem against us are in reality working together for our good. So long as we are rooted in the Divine love, so long as we are abiding in Christ, our spiritual life, maintained continuously from its infinite source, will grow and overcome the forces that are opposed to it. For not only is He that is with us greater than all that can be against us, but the life that is kindled in us is the mightiest power in the universe, and though cast down at times by the adverse circumstances of the world, cannot be destroyed, but rises victorious over them all, and uses them for its growth in grace. We are not at the mercy of the thousand contingencies of life. The troubles that come to us are not accidents. Divine wisdom is shaping all our ends. Our life is hid with Christ in Him who is better than all His gifts, who continues while all things else fail. And trusting in Him and walking in His ways, the character we thus build up will control and use the occasions and opportunities of life, whether they come in the shape of duties or trials ; and the form and direction of our life will be Christlike and heavenward !

VI

MOULDED AND BEATEN WORK

"He made it a molten calf."—Ex. xxxii. 4.

"And this work of the candlestick was of beaten gold, unto the shaft thereof, unto the flowers thereof, was beaten work."—Num. viii. 4.

I HAVE chosen these two texts to point out an instructive lesson regarding the easiness of sin and the difficulty of holiness. The material of the golden calf which Aaron constructed was poured into a mould and shaped without trouble; the material of the seven-branched golden candlestick had to be beaten out carefully and slowly with much toil and pains.

The Israelites at the foot of the sacred mountain sought to make a god for themselves; for Moses, who had been their visible providence, had disappeared within the dark clouds that covered the summit, and there was nothing to represent God to their imaginations. In these circumstances they found an old mode of religion ready to their hand. The idea of the calf which in Egypt they saw the inhabitants worshipping, and in whose idolatrous

feasts they themselves in their state of bondage and ignorance doubtless joined, came up before their minds. The pattern of it was easily constructed; it required no originality, no effort of thought, only an exercise of memory; and Aaron cast their golden jewels into the familiar mould, and out of it came the familiar image. So easy, so natural, so inevitable was the process, that Aaron used language regarding it which seemed to imply that, when he lighted the furnace and poured into the mould the molten gold, the image of the calf came out of its own accord. He did not take the blame to himself, but laid it upon the circumstances. His own personal agency had nothing to do with the fabrication of the calf; it was a purely spontaneous occurrence. And it may be further remarked that, in order to get the image sharp and clear out of the mould, Aaron must have put into the gold an alloy of some inferior metal, or it was already in the ornaments of the Israelites. For gold, when melted, contracts on cooling more than any other metal, and leaves the sides of the mould, and therefore does not reproduce the pattern with sufficient accuracy. Thus the very form of his idolatry as well as the essence was a corruption of the purity of the fine gold which alone ought to be offered to the Lord.

And is this not true of all sin? It has a mould prepared for it in a world lying in wickedness, and in the deceitful heart of man. All the circumstances of a fallen world favour it. There is a predisposi-

tion towards it in our weak, erring nature. It comes easy and natural to us. We fall into it of our own accord, as it were, without any special effort. We follow the multitude to do evil. We let ourselves drift with the current. Man at the beginning sought out many inventions; and into the shape of these unhallowed inventions he still puts his thoughts and feelings and actions of rebellion against God almost instinctively. The pattern of sin is as old as Adam. The mould in which his sin was cast is the mould that is used over and over again in every new sin that is still committed. The first transgression was not only the root, but also the type of every transgression, just as the whole plant is a development and modification of the primitive leaf, and constructed after its pattern. The experience of the first sinner repeats itself in the experience of every sinner since.

We have a striking example of this in the temptation and fall of Noah after the flood, which was a renewal in the new creation of the experiment made in the old. Noah ate the forbidden fruit in the vineyard, as Adam ate it in Eden; and the consequences in both cases were precisely similar. Features of resemblance between the two temptations may be seen even in the smallest details. Satan himself cannot do anything original. He is rightly called the ape of God. And all his evil work is only an imitation of God's work, in an inferior manner and with inferior material, with

something essential left out, or something superfluous added which spoils it utterly. And so he tempts men to become imitators of God's work with similar admixture of baseness—to put on the form of godliness without the power, to assume a name to live while still dead, to get goodness by cheap and easy methods without any self-denial or trouble, to be hypocrites instead of genuine characters.

Why is it that we think so little of articles cast in a mould, in comparison with articles that are wrought by the hand? Why are structures of brick with stucco facings less valuable than structures of hewn stone carved by the sculptor? Why is a plaster statue of no account when placed side by side with a marble one, or a gate or railing of cast iron beside similar articles of wrought iron? In many cases they look as well, if not better; and they are more regular and uniform in their execution, wanting the inequalities and roughnesses which much of what is made by the hand must necessarily have. Is it not because these moulded articles are easily made, involving the smallest expenditure of toil or time or thought? They can be manufactured and multiplied by the thousand with the greatest ease once the mould is formed. The maker puts as little as possible of himself into them. He is not an artist, but a mere mechanic. He is not a fellow-worker with God, but makes the fire and the mould, and the circumstances of his craft do the work of his brain and hand for him. The work to

which he gives so little of himself does not prove to him a moral discipline; and we cannot fail to see that crafts in which men mould their things, instead of carving and shaping them by the toil of their hands and the thought of their minds, have more or less of an injurious effect upon the operatives.

The essence of all sin is a desire to get things in the easiest way—to run things into moulds, rather than to hew or carve or build them with slow, patient toil and care. And hence when persons do not take thought or trouble to do what is right, they always blame circumstances and not themselves for the wrong. When they do not resist temptation, they say that they could not help themselves. The excuse which Aaron gave for his sinful act was wonderfully true to human nature. He was weak and timid, and rather than draw down upon him the hostility of the Israelites, he would comply with their request. It would be too great trouble to carry out the convictions of his own conscience and oppose the idolatrous clamours of the crowd. The easiest solution of the difficulty was to recall the old Egyptian calf-god, make a mould of it, light a furnace and melt in it the golden offerings of the people, and then cast into the mould this molten mass, and say that it was the people who forced him to do this thing, and that it was the fire and mould that formed the image. The first act of transgression was of the same nature. It was cast into a mould ready made for it. Satan tempted Eve and made a mould in which her weak will shaped

itself and came out in a definite act of rebellion against God. The woman made a mould for her husband, into which his weak will readily flowed and shaped itself into an act of sinful compliance. And Adam blamed not himself but his wife; and Eve blamed not herself but Satan.

And does not every act of sin thus find a mould ready made for it? Does it not conform to the old common pattern? Do we not all say when we sin, it was the mould that did it? The man with a violent temper says, by way of excuse when he indulges it, that he was born with it, and that he simply obeys his natural impulse. He casts his violent act or his violent language into the mould of his evil temper already made for it. Ill-temper is a sin requiring long and hard self-discipline to remove it; and therefore it is far easier to give way to it, and let it run into its accustomed channel. The man who steals or lies, instead of recognising the personal heinousness of his sin, casts the blame upon his circumstances, and says, "I had to steal, for I could not get along otherwise." "I had to lie, to get my goods sold or my way cleared." The sensualist excuses his sensuality on the ground that the wicked world of seduction has made him what he is. All the charms of the cup of pleasure are so many natural calls upon his easy self-indulgence, so many insinuating persuasions to which he passively yields. The covetous man seeks to acquire and accumulate because he has already the mould of

wealth, and it seems the proper consequence of his position that he should endeavour to become richer. Increase and progress in his present line seem the right thing. Such a course of proceeding commends itself by its extreme naturalness and reasonableness in the circumstances, and therefore it fits in with his state of mind, and he must conform to it. The sceptic says that the atmosphere of doubt by which he is surrounded has produced his unbelief.

We speak of fate and fatality, and consider our conduct an inevitable destiny. We say of our sin that it is inherited, and therefore incurable, or that it is somehow imposed upon us against our will. Like the Israelites of old, we plead, "We are delivered to do these abominations." We look upon our temptations as opportunities, occasions which come to us for doing what is agreeable to our will; we yield to them as if this yielding were the end and purpose of such opportunities being given us. Thus sin is regarded as a misfortune demanding pity, and not a wilful act drawing down condemnation. It is the consciousness of misery that we have in our sin, not the consciousness of guilt. We pity but do not blame ourselves. The mould of sin, the fire of temptation have made us all what we are, and therefore we have every excuse to offer to God. If we had been placed in other circumstances, we should have been different persons; but situated as we are, what else could be expected but that we should take the shape and tone of our surroundings?

I have thus shown that sin is an easy thing that casts itself into a mould already prepared for it, and disowns its own agency and responsibility by laying the blame upon circumstances. I have now, in the second place, to turn to the image of the golden candlestick in the tabernacle as an illustration of the difficulty of godliness. The material of the seven-branched golden candlestick was not run into a mould already prepared for it. There was no mould for it in existence, but only the pattern shown to Moses on the mount. Its original existed in heaven; and the carrying out of the design on earth was an entirely original work.

It was all hand-made work. If it had been fashioned in a mould, the gold would require, as I have said, to be debased. And such debasing would have been altogether unsuitable for the service of God. Only by beaten work could the purity of the gold be preserved. Not only the shafts and the branches, but also the minutest ornamentation of the almond flowers, were produced by beaten work, by the slow, patient toil of the hammer of Bezaleel and Aholiab. It was the most elaborate of all the vessels of the sanctuary, because it represented the result of what all the other vessels typified and led up to—the light of the world; and yet it was beaten out of one solid piece of gold. The workman who fashioned it must have pondered minutely over every part, and bestowed immense labour and skill upon all its details; and the pattern and symmetry of the

whole must have been clearly in his mind, while from one mass of metal he beat out each shaft and floral ornament. At the present day there is a distinction made between artists and artizans; and the man who designs is not the man who executes the work. The sculptor moulds the statue in clay, and the workman carves it out in marble. But in the better days of art, Ghiberti hammered out the glorious bronze gates of the Baptistery of Florence, which his own master mind designed; and Michael Angelo himself chiselled his conceptions into life. And so the artist of the sacred candlestick of the tabernacle, under the Divine inspiration, executed himself the whole work. The whole idea of it thus implied personal thought and toil and care.

While it is easy for man to sin, it is difficult for man to be holy. He finds moulds for his sin lying ready to his hand, without any trouble. But he has to fashion, as it were, by the toil of his hands and the sweat of his soul, with the Divine help, the means by which he may be rescued from his sin and folly. We can mould a false diamond in glass or paste in a few minutes; but nature requires ages of slow, patient, workmanship to crystallise the real diamond from the dark charcoal. We can cover common deal wood with an exquisitely grained veneer of walnut or mahogany at a small expense and with little effort; but the grain of the walnut or mahogany represents many years of strain and struggle, during which the tree grew its beautiful

markings. Thus in the human world we can make easy imitations of moral and spiritual qualities, which when genuine can only be produced by slow, patient self-discipline, by many prayers and tears and toils. The paste diamond of religion, that glitters so brightly and deceives so many, can be manufactured in the mould of easy compliance with outward church duties and rites; the veneer of godliness can be assumed by a profession which costs nothing, and makes no demand of self-sacrifice upon the inner nature. But the deliverance from sin and the formation of holiness, which the salvation of Christ implies and involves, can only be through toil and suffering.

This is the significance, the great characteristic, of the revelation of "Grace," of which the beaten work of the candlestick is the symbol. The first promise to our race announces redemption through pain and toil and sorrow. The bruising of the serpent's head is to be accomplished only through the wounding of the victor's heel. The Levitical institutions disclosed the painfulness of the work of grace in a most remarkable manner. Their restrictions, their heavy burdens, their sacrifices of blood and death, all speak in the most impressive manner of the evil of sin and the costliness of the deliverance from it. And the life and death of our Saviour disclose this in a way still more solemn and emphatic. He became a man of sorrows. The triumphs of His love were accomplished through the toils of His

humanity. His very miracles show most conspicuously the pains and sufferings through which they were wrought. He told the disciples who wished to do good without any trouble, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." And even after the triumphs of resurrection and glorification in heaven, He appeared ever and anon to favoured witnesses with the old tokens of suffering and death. To Saul He revealed Himself on the way to Damascus as "Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest." In the midst of the seven golden candlesticks the beloved disciple heard Him saying, "I am he that liveth, and was dead." In the midst of the throne John saw through his tears a "Lamb as it had been slain." And as the history of man's salvation is thus a record of toil and pain and sacrifice, so the Christian life in the individual and in the Church is developed only by laborious spiritual effort, by the sweat of the soul. So long as the slain Lamb sits upon the throne of heaven, so long will self-sacrifice be the root and the fruit of all life that is worthy of the name. How expressive when viewed in this light are the promises given to the Seven Churches of Asia in connection with the overcoming of some besetting sin! It is to him that overcometh the hindrance in himself and in the world that God now gives to eat of the tree of life.

The candlestick of God's revelation of the way of grace to man is indeed of beaten work! It is a novelty in a world of darkness and ignorance. It

has to be wrought out by God in heaven and man on earth, by the counsels of eternity and the labours of time. All the dispensations fashioned it ; all the work of the kings and prophets and godly men of old was expended upon it. In shaping it the Son of God Himself lived and suffered and died. It sums up and represents all the great aim and end of the sentence which God pronounced upon the sin of the world—" In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," and by means of which He wished to bring about the redemption of the world.

The beaten work of man's salvation must be performed with the greatest care and consecration. Fra Angelico painted his immortal frescoes on his knees in prayer ; and so with prayer should the candlestick of our religious life be beaten out. It is indeed a long and painful work to build up and shape a holy character. We can construct no candlestick to give us light by merely casting our material into the mould of another to save us trouble ; we must ourselves construct it with much toil and patience and care. A traditional faith will do us no good. We cannot get light on God's Word without hard study ; we cannot get light on the way of providence but by long obedience and sore experience. The light on our path must, like that of the glowworm or the firefly, be a vital influence. Often indeed when reaching forth into fuller light are we dashed back into deeper darkness. Often our best work is marred by blemishes and has to be done over again.

Often we come so far short of our own ideal and of God's standard that we despair of being able to achieve any work that can please God or do any good in the world.

But well is it that the candlestick should be of beaten work. Were it merely produced by casting, were our salvation to be accomplished by a charm or a mere wish or prayer we should be more harmed than benefited. But the toil and the trouble and the suffering involved in the beaten work have blessed effects. All that is best in us and likest God comes out in the process. We are fellow-workers with God—Divine artists. We are kept humble and patient; for we behold an ideal before us to which we cannot attain. We are kept trustful and persevering; for we know that God will perfect that which concerneth us. Christ Jesus, the true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, is our pattern. He is the Divine example for each one of us. In Him we are complete. In Him is the perfectness of all our imperfect work. In Him is the holiness of our unholy lives. "His greatness flows around our incompleteness: round our restlessness, His rest." And in proportion as we strive to be like Him in every action and experience of life, so in proportion are we true Christians and true lights of the world.

As moulded work is a mere mechanical product, the same exactly in ten thousand examples, so the tendency of sin is to reduce the individual to the

low level of the mass. But the tendency of the beaten work of grace is to bring out our individuality, and with it a rich variety of character and experience. Each believer lives his own personal life in Christ, and carries out his individual work with Christ. Our faith is not traditional but experimental. We believe, not because others believe, but because we ourselves have been brought under the power of the truth. We love Jesus, not because others love Him, but because He is precious to ourselves. We do His work, not because it is considered proper, or because it is expected of us, but because we find in it our own highest happiness.

We are apt to imagine that unless our Christian lives are framed after one special model, they fail to conform to the Divine will. We must all be and do the same thing. But such a method is not God's method. Idolatry casts the object of its worship into a mould because it is easy ; whereas grace makes its golden candlestick of beaten work, because the difficulty of the process brings out most perfectly the ends of salvation. Pattern religion, like pattern ornamentation, is always mechanical and inferior. It is done rapidly in poor material ; it wants reality and solidity. It does not bear the Master's strokes, the traces of the tool. The Church and the World are poorer by the loss of the varied gifts and graces and experiences of those who might have borne personally the marks of the Lord Jesus, and been fashioned, each according to his own real

natural character, after the Divine pattern by the Master's own workmanship. It is the slow, patient, toilsome, beaten work of grace that enriches and beautifies the world, that satisfies God, and that endures when all the moulds of sin shall be broken, and all the work that was cast into these moulds shall perish.

The artist workman of old chiselled his sculpture in the clear air of Athens, with the blue sky overhead and the purple mountains around. Benvenuto Cellini wrought his masterpieces surrounded by the gorgeous palaces of Florence, with the golden sunsets of the Apennines confronting him when he lifted his eyes from his finished work. The beaten work of the artist needed and created an atmosphere of purity and beauty around it. But the moulded work of our modern factories darkens the atmosphere of the world with its smoke, blots out its beauty, and creates those squalid conditions of life which react with such baneful effect upon the morality of a people. And thus the gracious purpose of God in making man's daily work to be a moral discipline to him, is to a large extent frustrated. We are living in hard conditions, caused by the moulding of the golden calf, where souls are stinted by the want of light and rest and beauty. Many around us are sacrificing life and health and all the highest things of man in the worship of the golden calf so moulded. Be it ours as Christians to make our candlesticks of beaten work, burning

with the light of the Christ whom we love and obey, and showing Him to others, that they, seeing our good works, may glorify Him also. And so shall the world be fairer and happier and holier by reason of our presence and our work in it.

VII

THE HARMONY OF CHRISTIAN GROWTH

"Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity."—2 Peter i. 5-7.

THE word in the text which has been translated in our version "add" is a very pictorial term, and refers to a choir of well-trained musicians, such as Heman or Asaph led in the days of David and Solomon. The idea which it implies is, that as the singers and the musicians each performed his special part in the Jewish service, and all combined in one perfect unison of sound; so the growth of the Christian character should be accomplished by the harmonious development of each moral quality, and the Christian life, composed of so many different elements, should be one continuous hymn of praise to Him who is our song and our salvation.

The musical illustration of Christian growth in the text is a very profound and far-reaching one. Music is not addressed to the ear only, or expressed exclusively by audible sounds. It belongs to the eye as well as to the ear. It may be felt when no

sound is heard. Keats says that "heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter," implying that there is a music which appeals to the soul, finer than anything that can be expressed by human voice or musical instrument. Beethoven was deaf, heard no outward sounds, but the soul of music was in him, and therefore with the deeper inner ear he heard continuously the Divine music to which all things are attuned. Music is the great principle of order. It enters into the essence of all things. The music of the spheres is not a mere poetic but a scientific phrase. Everything speaks to the ear of the thoughtful of the wonderful rhythm of the universe. Light, eldest-born of things, comes to us in musical vibrations, and its spectrum is as harmonious as the diatonic scale. The scents of flowers form chords and octaves of fragrance, that produce a most delightful impression upon the nerves of smell. The streams are musical, as they keep up by their perpetual circulation the life of the world. Even the rocks are musical, as Memnon's statue, when some electrical power touches their particles, and arranges them by some strange polarity into the most symmetrical crystals. And to this cadence of the whirling earth our own human hearts involuntarily beat time ; and this wonderful rhythm of nature is within our own frames. With this universal harmony the Apostle wishes the growth of the Christian character to correspond. Calm and grand as when the morning stars sang together on the first day of

creation, Nature moves in her appointed orbit, and her blades of grass and grains of sand and drops of water tell us that we must be brought into concord with the beneficent law which they all obey so steadfastly and harmoniously. What Nature does unconsciously and will-lessly, we are to do consciously and willingly. We are to keep step and time to the music of the universe, and to add to our faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity; and thus practically make the statutes of the Lord our song in the house of our pilgrimage.

There are two ways in which we may add to our faith all the graces which the Apostle enumerates. We may add them as a builder adds stone to stone in his wall; or we may add them as a plant adds cell to cell in its structure. Both these modes of increase are used separately or in combination in Scripture to illustrate Christian growth. We are said to be rooted and grounded in love, and to grow into an holy temple in the Lord. We are rooted as plants in the Divine life, deriving our nourishment and stability from it; we are grounded as living stones on the precious corner-stone; the double image expressing in combination the active and passive sides of Christian faith. And so likewise the combination of ideas, borrowed from plant life and from architecture, to express the growth of Christian life unto an holy temple in the Lord, denotes the two modes in which growth is made—by active exertion and passive trusting, by being

fellow-workers with God, working out our own salvation, while we realise that it is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do of His good pleasure. We have not only to rest after the manner of a building on the finished work of Christ, but we have to draw after the manner of a plant out of His fulness, grace for grace.

Whether, therefore, we take our illustration from architecture or from plant life, the essential point, as implied by the significance of the word "add" in the original, is that growth should be harmonious. Architecture is said to be "frozen music." This is true of the commonest wayside wall. What is it that makes the sight of a well-built wall so pleasing to the eye? What is it that makes building a wall such an interesting employment that children take instinctively to it when they are in a suitable place, and have suitable materials at hand? Is it not the love of symmetry, the delight in shaping large and small, rough and smooth, pieces of stone, adapting them one to the other, and placing them in such a way that together they make a symmetrical structure? Every wall, be it rude as a moorland dyke, represents the love of order and the difficulties that have been overcome in making the stones of the wall to harmonise with one another. And if we see this curious harmony in the humblest rustic building, how grandly does it come out in the magnificent Gothic cathedral, where every part blends faultlessly with every other part, and carries out the design of the architect; and

clustered pillar, and aerial arch, and groined roof soar up in matchless symmetry, and the soul is held spellbound by the poetry which speaks through the entire structure.

There is a remarkable peculiarity in the text in the original, which must be specially pointed out if we are to understand the full meaning of the Apostle's words. The preposition which we have translated "to" should be rendered by "in"; and so rendered we are significantly taught that Christian growth is not by mechanical addition, but by vital increase. We are to add not "to" our faith, but "in" our faith, virtue, and "in" our virtue knowledge, and so on. Whether our addition be in the manner of a building or in the manner of a plant, it must be truly a growth — wherein that which went before determines what shall follow after, supplies it with the impulse of development, and keeps it in the symmetry of the typical form.

Faith is the fundamental, all-essential principle. We cannot begin to build without this sure foundation; we cannot begin to grow without this living root. There is no spontaneous growth in the spiritual world any more than in the natural; and faith is the germ that unites our dead souls with the things of eternal life, and starts in them the heavenly process by which spiritual life grows to more and more. Faith is not merely a condition of salvation which God imposes, for which anything else might have been substituted; it is not merely the assent of

the intellect to credible testimony, or the trust of the heart in that which supplies its need. It is much more: it is the very principle of spiritual life. "The just shall live by faith." It is a vital apprehension of the work of Christ, the establishment of a vital union with Him as the Redeemer, in virtue of which we spiritually live in Him and become partakers of His holiness and blessedness. And being thus a living principle, it must necessarily grow like all living things. It cannot remain single or inoperative. It must take to itself all the forms, exercise all the functions, and bring forth all the products of life.

The first thing that we are commanded by the Apostle to "add" to our faith is virtue, meaning by this term vigour, manliness. In our faith we are to manifest this quality. Our faith is to be itself a source of power to us. We are to be strong in faith. It is to be to us the power of God unto salvation, enabling us to overcome the temptations and evils of the world, and to rise above all the infirmities of our own nature. It is not enough that the Christian character should be beautiful, it should also be strong. Strength and beauty should be the characteristics not only of God's house, but also of God's people. But how often is the quality of strength absent from piety. Piety in the estimation of the world is synonymous with weakness and effeminacy. The world is apt to think that it is only weaklings who are pious—persons who have

neither strong intellects, nor strong affections, nor strong characters. Young men are too apt to be ashamed of confessing Christ openly before men, under the fear that they should be regarded as destitute of manliness. And too many professing Christians are confessedly "feeble folk." It is most necessary, therefore, that we should add to our faith courage, fortitude. Our faith should be manifested as it was in olden times by a victorious strength which is able to overcome the world, which fears the Lord and knows no other fear.

To this strength or manliness we are further commanded to "add" knowledge. In our manliness we are to seek after knowledge. The quality of courage is to be shown by the fearlessness of our researches into all the works and ways of God. We are not to be deterred by any dread of consequences from investigating and finding out the whole truth. The Bible places no restrictions upon an inquiring spirit. It does not prevent men from examining and proving all things, and bringing even the most sacred subjects to the test of reason. God says to us in regard to the holiest things, "Come and let us reason together." He has given to us the faculties by means of which we may find out truth and store up knowledge; and He wishes us to exercise these faculties freely in every department of His works. We hear pious persons too often casting contempt upon knowledge, and identifying piety with ignorance, as if the more ignorant a person is the more

true and simple his faith is likely to be. They are jealous of everything that they think superfluous, and pare down religion to what they imagine to be the necessaries of salvation. In the widespread diffusion of such a spirit in the Church, the Apostle may well enjoin us to add to our virtue knowledge. God wishes us to have a large and enlightened faith; for the more our knowledge—not merely of sacred, but also of secular things—increases, assuredly the more we shall be delivered from the bondage of superstition, and have a firm and fearless faith. The Christian religion is not a cunningly devised fable, or a groundless persuasion endangered by inquiry; it flows from knowledge. The wisdom from above includes not only the knowledge that we are pardoned sinners, but also all that can furnish the understanding and fill the soul with food for its high capacities and boundless desires.

But further, the Apostle enjoins us to add to our knowledge temperance. This had originally a much wider meaning than that to which it is now restricted. It meant sober-mindedness, a chastened temper and habit of the soul, a wise self-control by which the higher powers kept the lower well in hand and restrained them from excesses of all kinds. And this sober-mindedness, which expresses better than any other single word the true temper of the Christian in this world, is an indispensable adjunct to the Christian character. With wonderful sagacity the Apostle commends us to add to our knowledge

temperance; for there is a tendency in knowledge to puff us up and fill our hearts with pride. The intellectual may be allowed to predominate over the emotional qualities; and thus the balance of Christian character be upset, and a cold, heartless type of religion be produced. It is only when we combine temperance with it that knowledge edifies us, that it makes us modest and teachable. Temperance gives us just estimates of ourselves and of the world. It gives us the *true* knowledge of all things. It enables us to use our knowledge aright, to convert thought into action, and vision into life. This temperance or self-government applies to all with which we have to do—with our thoughts and feelings and actions. We are to know ourselves and our relations to God's Word in order to regulate our life accordingly.

To this self-government we must add patience. Our self-government itself is to be an exercise of patience. In our temperance we are to be patient, not giving way to a hasty temper or a restless disposition. As the plant slowly ripens its fruit, so we are to ripen our Christian character by patient waiting and patient enduring. It is a quiet virtue, and is apt to be overlooked and underestimated. But in reality it is one of the most precious of the Christian graces. The ostentatious virtues speedily expend their force, but patience silently stores it up. And while it is the most precious, it is also the most difficult. It is far easier to work than to wait;

to be active, than to be wisely passive. But it is when we are still that we know God, when we wait upon God that we renew our strength. Patience places the soul in the condition in which it is most susceptible to the quickening influences of heaven, and most ready to take advantage of new opportunities.

But to this patience must be united godliness. Godliness is godlikeness, having the same mind in us that was in Christ Jesus, viewing everything from the Divine point, and living in our soul's life as fully in the light of His presence, as we live in our bodily life in the light of the sun. And exercising ourselves unto this godliness, our patience will have a Divine quality of strength and beauty imparted to it such as no mere natural patience possesses. We rely upon the unfailing mercy and unchanging faithfulness of God ; and therefore we may well be patient and endure the ills of life, when we have thus the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.

But godliness has too often in the history of the Church been dissociated from the human virtues, the social qualities. Those have been considered most godly who have forsaken the company of their fellows, broken all the ties of life, and immured themselves in deserts, in order that they might be free to love God and to meditate upon Divine things without any distraction. In every age of the Church men have thought they were doing God service, when

they were persecuting their fellow-creatures, and casting out the sympathies of their human nature. In their desire to glorify God, as they thought, they forgot what was due to man. How much moroseness and sullenness is there among professing Christians? How much magnifying of Divine things, as they are called, at the expense of human things? To be godly in the estimation of many is to be self-mortified and ascetic; and by a rigid observance of fasts and sacraments and ordinances, to draw a line of separation between themselves and the world. Such seeming godliness is not only one-sided, it is altogether wrong and hateful. There can be no godliness where there is no brotherly kindness. Love to God and love to man must spring out of the same root. In our godliness, as the Apostle says, we must have brotherly kindness; our brotherly kindness must be an essential element of our godliness. We are to show our godliness by our brotherly kindness. Sin separates between God and man, and between man and man. Grace unites man to God, and man to man. It is ōnly when the higher relation is formed that we are able to fulfil perfectly the lower. Our brotherly kindness will be purified of all its meanness and selfishness when it springs from godliness; and on the other hand, our godliness will have imparted to it, when it is combined with brotherly kindness, an element of reality and tenderness which will save it from formality and Pharisaism. How can we love God whom we see not, if we love

not the brother whom we see? How can we love God Himself, if we love not the image of Him which we see in every human brother? We wrong God when we are unkind, ungenerous, and uncourteous to each other. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," is a saying of wide import and application. "Why persecutest thou me?" God says to every one whose godliness is not accompanied and manifested by brotherly kindness.

But brotherly kindness is apt to be restricted to friends only — to those who belong to the same place or the same church, or who are called Christians. It must, therefore, be conjoined with charity. In our brotherly kindness we are to exercise a large-hearted charity. We are to mingle with it godliness, in order to expand our charity, to make it like His who maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Universal kindness of thought, word, and deed is what is implied in this charity. It is not a theological term or thought, but a human catholicity. And how necessary is charity in the religious world! What party feelings and jealousies and rivalries and bitter antagonisms have we among those who profess the same Christian faith! What a narrow conception of the kingdom of heaven do even the most charitable of us frame to ourselves! All that is associated with our own way of thinking and believing be-

longs to it, while all that is foreign is excluded. We are all more or less aristocrats as regards religion. We like it to be confined to ourselves and to those who profess our creed. It is hard to realise the Christian principle of communion—that "privileges and blessings gain instead of losing by being widely shared." Peter himself found it difficult to let go his narrow Jewish prejudices, and to feel that God is no respecter of persons, but accepts in every nation those who fear Him and work righteousness under a different creed and by a different method. And his exhortation to add to our brotherly kindness charity is made more emphatic by his own experience of its difficulty. We are accustomed to hear about the strait gate and the narrow way and the few who find it, and we interpret this to mean an exclusive faith and a narrow Gospel. It is well to be always reminded, then, that it is only with "all saints," all kinds of saints, that we can know the love that passeth knowledge, and be filled with all the fulness of God; not when we are thinking only of our own little sect, and endeavouring to promote its interests exclusively, but when we are thinking of and caring for the character and relations of the whole flock of Christ.

Such, then, are the graces which we are enjoined by the Apostle to add to each other, not as separate fruits dispersed widely over the branches of a tree, but to develop from each other, as the berries of a cluster of grapes growing on the same stem,

mutually connected and mutually dependant. Such are the graces, to use the musical illustration of the text, which we are to temper, to modify the one by the other; just as the musician, in tuning his instrument, gives to each note not its exact mathematical value, but alters it to suit its neighbour notes, and thus produces a delightful harmony.

This is the ideal of a perfect Christian character. It must have these traits; it must be characterised by these qualities. These are the fruits of the Spirit. These are the products of genuine faith. They are not heroic qualities which only a Peter, a Paul, or a John, which only one in a century, or one in a thousand, is expected to produce. They are the ordinary qualities which should belong to every Christian, and by means of which he proves the sincerity of his faith, and the degree in which it is exercised.

But, alas! how rare is such a harmony of graces in the Christian character! How few add to their faith all the qualities enumerated! How many gaps are there in the cluster! how many substitutes for the real fruit! How many one-sided unsymmetrical Christians do we know; good men whose good qualities are to a large extent neutralised by their infirmities and defects! How necessary, then, is it to "give all diligence" to add to our faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity! It requires close study, persevering effort, the most strenuous labour. You can-

not get these graces by a mere pious wish or a mere attendance at church; you must cultivate them assiduously. They are not native to the soil of the human heart; they must, therefore, be treated as delicate exotics, carefully shielded from frost, and fully exposed to sunshine, and supplied with the appropriate means of nourishment and growth.

And as an encouragement to diligence, the Apostle reminds us significantly, by the very terms which he uses, that these qualities are not isolated, but, as I have said, have a vital connection with one another. They are not like the links of an iron chain, manufactured separately and mechanically added to each other; but they are like the living cells of a growing plant, in which one cell gives birth to another, and communicates its own qualities to it. If our faith is in lively exercise, it will produce virtue; and if our virtue is in lively exercise, it will produce knowledge; and if we grow in knowledge, we shall grow in temperance; and the more temperate we are, the more patient do we become, and so on. The spiritual force acquired by the exercise of one gracious quality increases in momentum, and prepares the soul for the exercise of another. The spiritual life is thus cumulative in its influence; and the more we grow, the easier do we find it to grow. The more faith we have, the more do we abound in all the Christian qualities. It should, therefore, be the prayer of each of us to get the help of Him who is the true Orpheus, the mighty Master of all

spiritual melodies, whose own life, free from one jarring note, made perfect music in the ears of God, to remove all the discords of our souls and lives, and attune our being to the harmonies of heaven. As the God of nature He maintains the principle of the correlation of organs, according to which one part is invariably associated with another part, and the typical structure is formed; and as the God of peace He has promised to sanctify us wholly, body, soul, and spirit, and to preserve us "blameless"—or, as the word in the original should be translated, "symmetrical"—in the full beauty and completeness of the Christian type of excellence, unto the coming of Christ.

VIII

WALKING WITH CHRIST IN WHITE

"They shall walk with me in white."—Rev. iii. 4.

WHITE is the colour of victory; it is the flag of truce that ends the war. Colours mark the different stages of the struggle of light with darkness; and the diffused white daylight that fills the morning sky indicates that the shades of night have all been vanquished. The mountain that lifts itself highest above its fellows is crowned with the pure white radiance of the snow. The torrent that leaps victorious over the rocky obstacle in its way breaks into dazzling masses of white foam. The ruddy fire that completely consumes its fuel blanches to a glowing whiteness in the heart of the furnace. The highest sublimation of matter is the crystallisation of the white flashing diamond from the charred remains of ancient life. Plants that overcome the unfavourable circumstances in which they are placed produce white blossoms. The flowers that bloom at night; that appear earliest in spring and latest in autumn, amid the uncertain weather of these seasons; that

ascend to the line of perpetual snow on Arctic shores and Alpine heights, the regions of storm, and have therefore to contend with conditions that are inimical to their growth and well-being,—are all almost invariably white.

In the human world, white is also the hue of triumph. It is in the white race of mankind that the conquests of civilisation culminate. It is the hoary head that crowns the ripest experience and the highest wisdom of human life. It is the pale face that marks the victory of thought and the subjugation of passion. We clothe with this triumphant hue those who overcome all the powers of darkness. We put the white robe on the child, as the symbol of its reversion, in an old worn-out world of sin and sorrow, to the unconscious innocence of Eden. We deck the bride in the pure white marriage dress, in token that love has conquered every difficulty that lay in the way, and completed her life. We wrap the dead in the white cerements of the tomb, in proof that they have triumphed over the last enemy, and earned their rest from all the temptations and troubles of life. And as we gaze through the door opened in heaven, with eyes which our tears have washed clean from the blinding dust of earth, and see the white-robed multitude around the throne with palms in their hands, we are told that these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

We thus see how deep-meaning and far-reaching is the symbolism which has consecrated the colour white to the uses of victory. We see that there is a reason for it in the nature of things as well as in the sentiment of mankind; that the instinctive fitness in it which has appealed to all ages and to all races has arisen from its use in the very constitution of nature. All triumphant things on earth are vestured in white, express in it their victory over everything that defileth—the sacredness of truth, the blessedness of purity, the strength of constancy. All triumphant things in heaven wear this white livery: from the great white throne on which sits He who overcame, to the white raiment in which they are arrayed who overcame by His help. The Book of Revelation is full of this symbolism. It lays upon it the deepest emphasis, and repeats it with the most frequent iteration and variety.

It is but part of this general significance, then, that to the few names in the Church of Sardis which had risen victorious over their circumstances, it was promised that they should walk with Christ in white. God was to pay them in kind. They had not defiled their garments; they should therefore continue to wear undefiled garments. They had kept themselves pure and unspotted from the peculiar sins which abounded in the world in which they lived; and therefore Christ would clothe them with the pure linen, white and clean, which is the righteousness of saints. Like the water-lily, which

emerges out of the dark mud at the bottom of the pond, and bears aloft its lovely chalice of purity, so amid the pagan impurities—the *sordes* of Sardis —these saints wore the white flower of a blameless life. It was doubtless the result of much struggle with the unfavourable circumstances in which they were placed. But Christ was with them; and He who Himself passed like a sunbeam untouched through the pollutions of the world, guarded them by His grace, so that the mire of Sardis thrown upon their white raiment did not harden or become ingrained upon it, but fell off as it dried, leaving no stain behind. The waves of the world's persecutions, which, in their case, were casting up mire and dirt, only purified more effectually their robes. There was with them in the glow of the furnace, where their hearts were being refined by the fire of trial, One like unto the Son of God; and, in consequence, the fire had no power over them, nor was a hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

1. The white vesture of the saints of Sardis was to be the result of three things: *activity*, *self-sacrifice*, *assimilation.* Let us look, first, at their *activity.* They were to *walk* with Christ in white. They had not merely a name to live, but they were truly living; and as a sign of their spiritual life, they were to walk with Christ, freed from the bondage of sin. They were to exercise the functions of life,

to advance along the shining path of the just, to go on to perfection. It was no mere idle robe of dignity or privilege that was put upon them to distinguish them from all others, but the robe of obedience and service. They were accounted worthy in the sight of God—not that they might rest satisfied with the degree of worthiness which they had attained, but that they might become still more worthy. They were invested with the righteousness of Christ, that as they seemed, so they might become. They wore their robe, as the repentant prodigal wore "the best robe" which his father put upon him, in token that he would become more worthy of his father's forgiveness and love. That robe was given to them to show forth the love of God in cancelling the past, and His purpose of grace in making them pure as He Himself is pure. The investiture of purity was to become the spirit of purity. The righteousness of Christ that was upon them for justification, was to be wrought out in them for sanctification. The disparity between their justified state and their character, which must necessarily have been great at the beginning of their spiritual course, was to disappear, and they were to be assimilated to the Divine nature.

The assumption of the robe of Christ's righteousness involves incessant activity. We are to walk with Christ, to live by Him, to work for Him. We are not to consider that we have already attained, or are already perfect; but we are to forget the

things that are behind, and to press forward towards the mark for the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus. Our robe of righteousness is indeed the gift of God, the investiture of Jesus, the inward work of the Spirit; but in a certain sense it can be said of it that it is our own work. We are washed by Christ in His blood; but it is significantly said of the white-robed multitude around the throne, that they themselves washed their robes in that blood. The action of Christ in us is the source of our own activity. Christ purifies our nature; we are to purify ourselves in all the manifestations of our life. Not as automatons are we to become pure as Christ is pure, but as co-operating with Him, as working out what He works in us. Our old leprous self is cleansed, not that we may go and show ourselves ceremonially to the priest only, but that we may exhibit ourselves as cured to the world in whatever things are pure and lovely and of good report. And as we go on to walk with Christ, as we live and suffer and work for Him, so will our robe become brighter, and our outward apparel will match more perfectly with our justified state and our high profession.

To walk with Christ in white, indeed, involves intense activity of soul and life. Those who walk with Christ cannot be at ease in Zion—cannot be satisfied with themselves. They have the example of Him who went about continually doing good before them; the record of the most intense and

concentrated life-work that the world has ever witnessed to study and imitate. They find it hard to keep up with Him; even though He graciously shortens His step to suit their weakness. But they must continue walking day after day. Spasmodic goodness is easy enough. It is comparatively easy to mount up with wings as eagles above the world altogether, inspired by the glowing enthusiasm of a recent conversion; it is even easy to run in the Christian course, touching the world only on tiptoe, the impetus of the running itself carrying us on; but to walk day after day and year after year over the long white road of ordinary Christian life; to work unresting and unhasting as Christ wrought,—this is a strain which only the strength that waiting upon God imparts can enable us to endure.

We are told that on one occasion, as the disciples followed Jesus, "they were afraid." They had obtained a transient glimpse, as He went before them, of His Divine Majesty, and of what His own words meant when He spoke of taking up His cross and following Him. To the selfish natural heart His sayings must ever be hard. It is a terrible demand which calls upon His disciples to die daily —to be crucified with Him. As they follow they must often be afraid, knowing their own weakness and deadly proneness to sin.

The Christian who lives not upon the surface, but sounds the depths of spiritual experience, must

necessarily be intensely active; must maintain an earnest, constant struggle with sin and self and the world; must be continually carrying on the great battle of life with this heavy, languid flesh that cleaves to the dust. And it is this vital activity that makes the soul and the life white. We know how action purifies in the natural world; how the foaming sea keeps everything in it alive; how the stagnant pond breaks into snow-white waterfalls as it is made to flow rapidly over the weir or dam; how the impure stream clarifies itself as it runs on. The plant that is actively alive throughout all its parts exhibits the perfection of hue and form of which it is capable. The animal that is most alert and agile in all its movements prevents the attack of parasites and other enemies that prey upon the sluggish animal. The mind and body of the indolent man become subject to diseases and morbid moods which fasten upon things that are still, as the fungus fastens upon a decaying tree. And so in the spiritual life, the more active that life is, the more bright and beautiful does it become; the more does it throw off and keep at bay the temptations and evils of a world lying in wickedness.

The beauty of holiness is best to be seen and most to be admired when it is engaged in works of faith and labours of love. Look afar off at a waterfall, and you see it frozen by the distance into rest, lying against the hillside like a wreath of snow; but go near, and you will see it to be ceaseless move-

ment, and bewildering change, and endless variety, great masses of seething foam and clouds of spray, rising and falling with a deafening roar. And so what appears to the admiring spectator as the restful whiteness of the saintly character, is to the saint himself a tumult of contentions ; myriads of thoughts and feelings and desires stirring within him, the flesh lusting against the spirit, the law of the members warring against the law of the mind, fightings without and fears within. What is perfection? It is but a vortex or centre of rest in the midst of a whirlpool of incessant changes. Nothing that lives can hold it long. It can only be maintained by constant motion and constant change. The white glare in the heart of a furnace is the intensest mode of motion ; the white blossom that crowns the most vivid life of the plant is a centre of ceaseless forces that are ever fleeting and ever being renewed. And so the white raiment of the saintly soul, which seems so calm and restful, is in reality the mutability of struggling powers, subdued to unity by faith in Christ, and dominated by the purity and the peace of heaven.

Walking with Christ in white is not merely guarding our purity from the pollution of the world, holding up the skirts of our white raiment so that it may not come into contact with anything that defileth. The Pharisees of old strove to obtain purity in that way, by continually avoiding defilement, by external mechanical washings. They

walked through the streets of Jerusalem in the long clothing of pretension, gathering their robes close to them, lest any unholy thing should touch and pollute them. They were punctilious in regard to all the ceremonial cleansings of the Mosaic law. But this is not the kind of purity which those who walk with Christ should seek to reach and maintain. Christ denounced this outside, unreal purity. What He wanted was not a negative but a positive quality —a quality obtained not merely by avoiding the least appearance of evil, but by a zealous pursuit of all that is useful and attractive; not by burying the talent in the earth in a white napkin, but by polishing it bright with constant use. We get it as Christ obtained His own spotless holiness, by the power of a loving life continually doing good. He was so engrossed with His work of healing that the corruption of the world had no power over Him; so occupied with His Father's business that Satan when he came could find nothing in Him. Never was He more pure than when He consorted with publicans and sinners to save them. Never was He more pure than when the woman who was a sinner, whose presence contaminated the purity of the Pharisee's house, washed His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. Never was His own holiness more transcendent than when He Himself touched the leper and became ceremonially unclean, while He said to him, "I will; be thou clean."

This is the only safe way in which we can pre-

serve our garments unspotted from the world—not by negations and proscriptions, but by positive acts of goodness ; not by being afraid of doing wrong, but by resolutely doing right. Continually thinking of evil to take precautions against it, we unconsciously become tainted with it. Negatively avoiding it, it insensibly infects us. Prudery is not purity, and Pharisaism is not cleanness of heart. Fastidiousness by its excess shows its defect, is practically indelicate and corrupt. The only safeguard against the incoming of the seven spirits worse than the one we have expelled, is not the emptying and the garnishing of the house, but the filling it with a living tenant, whose living principles, ever in lively exercise, can keep them out. We shall be proof against the pollutions of the world by maintaining within our own souls the life of godliness, and by endeavouring to make others partakers with us of like precious faith. We are least in danger from the sins of others when we most help them to get rid of them ; and the temptations which we are helping others to overcome have least power over ourselves. We purify our own nature most when we seek to purify others. More unspotted shall our own garment be, not when in Pharisaic pride we hold it back lest it should be defiled by contact with impurity, but when we gird it round us, to wash the feet that have trodden deepest the world's miriest ways.

It is no mere negative view, the whiteness of the

saints. We are apt to be repelled by it, thinking it cold and lifeless and unnatural. We gladly exchange the strange purity of the snow for the brown familiar earth. The lives of saints seem scarcely human in their immunity from the failings and sins of other men. It would seem as if flesh and blood could not contrive to retain their warm sensibility and sympathy in this immaculate dress. But just as white is the combination of all colours, so the purity of the saints embraces all human virtues, and is the perfection of them. He who follows that holiness without which no one can see the Lord, is distinguished for his brotherly kindness and charity. The purity of God's saints is the purity of the snowdrop and not of the snow-crystal: preserving the choicest beauty of the snow, while that beauty is made compatible with all the graces and activities of life. It was not the snowy purity of death that invested the saints of Sardis, but the snowy purity of the blossoms of spring, that have in them the promise and the making of abundant fruit; and as all our best natural fruits—the apple, the pear, the cherry, the orange, the strawberry—come from white blossoms, so do our best spiritual fruits.

2. The white robe of the saints of Sardis was the dress of *sacrifice*. They were made priests unto God; they had yielded themselves a living sacrifice. They had given up their worldly interests for the cause of Christ, and they counted not their lives dear unto them; and they had given to Christ their

hearts, to live no more unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them. And in consequence they wore the priestly robe. The white things of nature are all sacrifices on its altar. The lofty mountain is robed in pure white snow, because it denies its own verdure in order to minister refreshing winds and rains and fertilising waters to the parched plains. The plant decks itself with its white blossoms, because it gives up its own individual life for the sake of the race. In white flowers the sacrifice is greater than in coloured ones, because in the former the green foliage undergoes the most complete transformation. And in conformity with this deep-lying truth, the priests of old wore garments of unsullied whiteness. The robes of kings and rulers are too commonly supposed to be the symbols only of their selfish pomp and grandeur, whereas, in reality, they are the symbols of their office, and mark them out as the ministers and servants of the people. Not for their own ends, but for the good of the people ought they to wear them. Kings reign for the benefit of their subjects, and they sacrifice their own ease and comfort in so doing. The duke was originally the leader of the army; the marquis the guardian of the boundaries, the lady the bread-distributer. And it is only in proportion as those who held such dignities act out the original ideas connected with them that their fine robes and appointments inspire respect.

The Jewish high priest wore his splendid dress

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for the same reason that the plant exhibits its brightest qualities when it blossoms. This was strikingly indicated in the parabolic blossoming of Aaron's rod before the Lord. The conspirators wished to get the office of the high priesthood for purposes of personal aggrandisement, and therefore their rods remained barren and dead. But the high priesthood was instituted for the good of mankind, and, therefore the rod of Aaron blossomed. The blossom of a plant is the part in which it gives its own life for the new life that is to spring from it through the fruit and seed; and it is in this unselfish part that all the beauty of the plant comes out and culminates. The rod of power may subdue life; it is only the rod of sacrifice that can create life. This was the meaning of the resplendent dress of the Jewish high priest. He was clothed in garments of glory and beauty when he ministered before the Lord with the blood of the slain animal, because he represented the religion of self-sacrifice. He was clothed in beautiful raiment for the same reason that the lily is clothed with more than Solomon's glory. The glory of Solomon represented the spirit of selfishness; but the beauty of the lily-blossom represents the spirit of self-sacrifice. On the Mount of Transfiguration even the raiment of our Lord became white as the light—whiter than any fuller on earth could make it—while He talked of His decease, the crown of His long self-giving for the world. And the faces of Moses and Stephen were irradiated

with the same heavenly effulgence when they offered up themselves in the cause of truth. Aaron's rod that budded was laid up in the ark of the Lord, as a token that the law of self-sacrifice which pervades all nature, and upon which the welfare and stability of nature depend, is the same law upon which all the ordinances of religion are based. It is the secret of all the beauty of nature and of human life, of the flower-face and the angel-face.

The saints of Sardis could not walk with Christ in white, without taking up their cross and denying themselves. And we cannot walk with Him and at the same time seek only to please ourselves. Christ gave Himself for the Church, "that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; and that it should be holy and without blemish." And as Christ gave Himself for us, that He might sanctify us, so must we give ourselves for Him, that we may live His life and not our own. We shall within the cloud of self-sacrifice, and under the shadow of the Cross, behold His glory and be changed into the same image.

3. And this leads me to speak, in conclusion, of the white robe of the saints of Sardis as the result of *assimilation*. In nature things become like their surrounding circumstances. The flowers of the snowy regions are white; the Alpine hare changes its fur and the ptarmigan its plumage from mottled

gray to pure white in winter, when all the hills are white with snow. The plants that in the warmer south are pink and blue, in Russia and northern Europe, the regions of snow, have white blossoms. Our natural life consists in a correspondence with its environment, and is the creature of the atmosphere it breathes.

And so, walking with Christ, men took knowledge of the saints of Sardis, by the purity of their life, that they had been with Jesus. We know what the companionship of a pure earthly friend can do for us, imparting to us his own noble spirit, strengthening us with his own high impulses, and moulding our character after the pattern of his own. And far more, when our faith is not a mere thing of creed and doctrine, but a living trust in a personal Saviour, does our walking with Christ renovate and transform us. The power of His character and life will so invest our nature that we shall live it ourselves. We shall be conscious of a growing purity of soul, created by our faith receiving out of Christ's fulness of grace, and beholding His Divine perfections, and so by reflection forming them within us.

But this process of assimilation, though begun and carried on more or less fully, cannot be perfected here. We walk indeed with Christ in white; but our whiteness is only relative. The whiteness of the flower is caused by the empty spaces between its cells being more numerous than in coloured flowers, which in consequence get filled with

air, and permit a fuller reflection of light. The whiteness of the highest crest of the sea-billow is caused by a large mixture of air with water. And so the whiteness of the saintly character here is caused by the mixture of heaven and earth. It is an aspiring effort, not a completed attainment: an attempt to get out of the element of sin into the element of holiness. Here we cannot be perfectly pure, for we are living in a world of sin, and we see Christ darkly as in a glass, behind the lattice-work of sacraments and ordinances. Here our highest point of Christian attainment is that from which we have the clearest view of Christ's worth and our own unworthiness. Here we cannot get the materials with which to fashion our dress in accordance with our hope. While the grace of God has renewed us, the times and the society in which we live have also their effect in assimilating us to their pattern. We can only think and act and live, for the most part, according to the average opinion and life around us. Christ Himself could not show His transfiguration robe in the streets of Jerusalem; and the white dress that Christ has given us cannot be displayed to eyes unprepared to appreciate it.

But it will be widely different when Christ fulfils to us His further promise—"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment." When the partial victory here has merged into the final and everlasting victory of heaven, then our raiment shall be assimilated to our circumstances—for all the

circumstances shall be of spotless purity. Righteousness shall dwell in the new heavens and the new earth : the people shall be all righteous. They shall all be clothed with white robes, and the city in which they dwell shall be of pure gold, like unto clear glass. Then we shall see Jesus as He is with unveiled face, looking forth clear as the sun. For sacraments we shall have open vision, and for a witnessing Spirit a manifested Saviour ; and we shall be like Him.

White is the reflection of all the rays of light. Here on earth many of the rays of the Sun of Righteousness falling on us are absorbed in our own dark character and circumstances, and give no visible return ; while others are refracted by the obduracy and dulness of our nature, and return only rainbow hues of hope. But in heaven the whiteness of our redeemed bodies and souls—purified through the last baptism of death from all earth's impurities, and fashioned like unto the glorious nature of Christ—will give back all the light of God, and we shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of our Father. This is the vision of beauty, held up before each of us in the clear mirror of God's Word, that may yet be realised by us. Let us dwell upon it often, not that we may be disgusted with a world of shame and defilement, and long to get away from it, but that we may walk more closely with Christ, and so become more worthy of Him. A gracious and helpful ministry is said, according to an Arabic

figure of speech, to be "something done by a white hand." Let our ministry be of this nature. Let our religion be a perpetual baptism of purification to us, and the discipline of our life a refiner's fire, by which we may obtain a character that shall be perfectly at home in that white world of infinite purity. Never was a more inspiring vision given to mortal man; and every one that hath this hope in him should purify himself, even as Christ is pure.

IX

THE PRIVILEGE OF SANCTUARY

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."—PSALM xxiii. 6.

IN primitive times, when men were apt to take the law into their own hands, and avenge their injuries at once upon the wrong-doer, provision was made to restrain this rude license of punishment. Certain places, with sacred associations connected with them, were sanctuaries to which the homicide in his extremity might flee, and where he would be protected until his case should be deliberately investigated by the proper authorities. In heathen lands the temples of the gods enjoyed this privilege, which in course of time became not a mere religious sentiment, but a custom expressly defined and sanctioned by law. Several towns, such as Thebes and Rome, owed their origin to the safe asylum which they offered to criminals and fugitives who wanted protection. In England during the Middle Ages the altar of almost every church was usually a place of refuge. There are many notices of

church-frith, or sanctuary, in Anglo-Saxon laws and canons; the immunity in some cases being confined to the immediate vicinity of the frith-stool, or stone chair placed near the Communion Table, and in others extended over a large area around the outside of the church. A few cathedrals, such as Ripon and Durham, had extraordinary privileges of sanctuary legally bestowed by the sovereign. On the north door of Durham Cathedral the huge knocker may still be seen with which the breathless refugee knocked for admission; and above it are two chambers where watchmen lived for the purpose of admitting the fugitive at any hour of the day or night. In the old village of Dull, in the Highlands of Perthshire, there is still standing one of the large upright crosses, dating as far back as the eighth or ninth century, which marked the limits of the space around the primitive church which possessed the right of sanctuary. Nothing is more remarkable than the treatment received by those who sought asylum in such churches and confessed their crime; their confession being regarded as a proof of their penitence, after which they were mercifully dealt with by the ecclesiastical authorities themselves, and not handed over to the civil power to be punished.

In Palestine a similar state of things existed in Bible times. All the forty-two Levitical cities possessed the right of sanctuary. But six refuge cities conveniently situated, three on each side of the Jordan, were especially set apart in order to receive

and lodge the homicide. The elders of the city to which he fled were required to judge his case; and if the act of murder was proved to have been unintentional, he was allowed to remain in the place. A suitable house was provided for him; and being necessarily shut out by his circumstances from the cultivation of the soil, he had to be taught a trade by which he might earn his own living. If found at any time beyond the radius of a mile around the city, the avenger of blood might slay him; but within this limit of protection he was perfectly safe, and at the death of the high priest he might return to his own house without fear.

It is this idea of a criminal seeking sanctuary in a city of refuge from the pursuit of the avenger that is implied in the text. The word "follow" means in the original "pursue"; and so understood, it supplies the key that opens up the significance of the whole passage. The circumstances in which David was placed when he composed the Twenty-third Psalm, irresistibly suggested to him the merciful provision made by the law of Moses for the manslayer. His son Absalom had risen up in revolt against him, and compelled his aged father to flee from his home and take refuge among the dreary uplands of Mahanaim. The desolate mountain scenery, in whose recesses he hid himself from his unnatural son, was an emblem of the dark wastes of sorrow over which his soul was passing at the time. Sometimes he fancied he heard upon the

breeze the sounds of his approaching enemies. The shadows flitting over the distant hills seemed as if they might be messengers sent by Absalom to take him. The thought of his past sins came vividly to his mind. Many a forgotten deed of wrong and bloodshed rose up before him in its true colours. The dreadful doom pronounced by the prophet upon the crowning sin of his life came home to his heart in all its dark suggestiveness. The secret forces of retribution which he had aroused by his sins had been following on his track with feet shod with wool, and now they seem to have confronted him in all their terribleness. He felt that he was only reaping what he had sown: that even the rebellion of his son and the alienation of his subjects were only the bitter fruit of a poisonous seed which he himself had planted in his life.

But in this extremity, when his fears were greatest, a light from heaven shone through the darkness into his soul, and showed to him that while he was compassed about with ills past reckoning, he was at the same time compassed about with songs of deliverance; that greater was He that was with him than all that could be against him. The Lord opened his eyes, and he saw, instead of avengers of blood following hard with their sword upon his track, the whole mountain round about him covered with horses and chariots of fire, and realised that goodness and mercy were following him to make reparation for his evil deeds. Mahanaim was to

him what it had been to Jacob in his hour of similar trouble, when behind he was pursued by the revengeful Laban, and before he was threatened by an injured brother. It justified to the Psalmist, as it had justified to the Patriarch, the full significance of its name—the Lord's Host. It was indeed a place where the Lord's Host met him; where instead of vengeance he met mercy, and where he expected evil found goodness.

After a violent storm in Nature, at whatever season it comes, there is a soft indescribable feeling of spring in the air; and so it has often been remarked that the effect of a great sorrow is to bring back the simplicity and tenderness of childhood. Never before was the faith of David so unselfish and his trust so childlike. God gave him in the green pastures and beside the still waters which he found even in the dreary wilderness, the years which the locusts of self-will and pride had eaten; gave him back all the freshness and fairness of his early youth. He returned from the weary toils and responsibilities of later years to the simplicity of his youthful shepherd life in Bethlehem. He breathed the atmosphere of his childhood. God's promise was fulfilled to him: "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there."

Let us look separately at the two elements of

David's song in the house of his pilgrimage: first, "Goodness and mercy shall surely follow me"; and then, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

1. The idea of goodness and mercy following a man is exceedingly beautiful and suggestive. There is a phrase in the Bible, with which we are familiar, which speaks of the "preventing mercies" of God; this word "prevent" formerly meaning not to hinder, as it does now, but simply to go before —God's mercies outrunning our necessities, going before them to anticipate and provide for them. It is in this sense that we usually think of the goodness and mercy of God, as going before us to prepare our way and to provide for our wants. But in our deeper moods we feel that we need quite as much that goodness and mercy should follow us. Our greatest troubles are ever those which belong to our past, which come from the things that are behind us, which we are striving to forget. Our march through life is like the march of an army through a hostile region. While we are conquering and possessing the present, we are leaving unsubdued enemies, and unconquered fortresses, and old inveterate habits of sin behind us, that will assuredly rise up and trouble us again. Our past is not dead and buried; it is waiting for us in some future ambush of our life. We need God, therefore, for our yesterdays as much as for our tomorrows: to be our rearward as well as our guide

and leader. We cannot move through the world, which God has made so beautiful and pronounced to be so good, without injuring its beauty and destroying its goodness. And in human society how often are our presence and work a cause of blighting instead of blessing! Our intercourse with one another is too often marred by our selfishness and covetousness. Looking back at night upon the record of a single day, do we not find in it many tokens and traces of evil, of which we are then heartily ashamed? How many mistakes have we committed? How many obvious duties have we neglected? How many unkind words have we spoken? How many results of unwise zeal and rash impatience and imprudence have we to deplore? Even our good deeds are so often disfigured by drawbacks that they will not bear reflection. Like the snail that marks its track with its own slime, so we indicate the way we have traversed by the impress of our own sinful being which we have left upon it. And this it is that makes the retrospect of a single day often so sad. This it is that gives a terrible sting to that dark hour ere the night and the day part, when life has reached its lowest point, and the sleeper suddenly awakes from his sleep, and all his sins rush upon his recollection, and he is overwhelmed with misery and self-contempt.

David had this experience in its darkest form. There is not in all human literature a more tragic reverse of fortune and feeling than that which

happened to him after his fatal fall. We see in the discord and alienation of his home, and the continual heaviness of sorrow that overwhelmed his life, what devastation a single evil deed, though deeply repented of, can make in an otherwise noble life. The once joyous shepherd who, on the hills of Bethlehem, sang like the lark out of the exuberance of a free and sunny nature, became the care-worn, heart-broken man who pursued his weary course through an avenue of darkened days to the tomb. And though we may not have sinned as David sinned, or suffered as David suffered, we all know in some form or other something of his remorse. By the grave of a dead friend or a dead pleasure, we realise as David felt beside the grave of his dead child the sorrow of things we ought not to have done. Death casts its dam across our love, and while we feel how suddenly deep it has become, we feel how unavailing is its depth for any practical purpose of love, and we remember with inextinguishable regret how shallow and careless had been its flow over the daily intercourse of life, and how loud its murmur over the common obstructions. We know of words that have wounded loving hearts, and deeds that have left a painful memory behind. And how earnestly do we wish that the past could be buried out of sight, and not have its presence haunting us any more. But, alas! there is no Lethe from which we may drink forgetfulness of the bitter memory that comes up and seems to mock our repentance: no

Jordan where we may wash away the leprous experience that clings to us like a second self, and have restored to us the serene conscience and the bright untroubled heart of the little child we once were. We are crushed by the thought that there is nothing really forgotten in this world; for the sin we have buried for ever out of sight, as we imagined, is gifted with a strange resurrection power, and at any time it may rise up to confront us. The most trifling association—the smell of a flower, the music of some old song—may bring back at once the guilty past, and fill the heart with the deepest remorse.

How precious in such an experience are the words of the text, assuring us that God is following us—not as the American Indian follows upon the trail of his enemy to slay him, not as the avenger of blood follows in his awful vendetta upon the track of the manslayer, but with goodness and mercy! He cries to us as we hasten away from Him in the sullenness and unbelief which sin produces—"I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." He can cast our sins behind His back; remove them as far as east is from the west. He can follow us as Jesus followed Peter when he cut off Malchus's ear with the sword, to heal the wounds we have inflicted, to redress the wrongs we have committed, to neutralise the consequences of our folly, ignorance, or sin. He can gather up all our woeful past in His boundless mercy, and

enable us as little children to enter His kingdom again. He can separate us from the debasing associations of our sin, give us a sense of recovered freedom and enlargement of heart, and enable us to begin anew, without the disabilities of former days clinging like fetters about our feet and impeding our steps.

In the physical world we see how Nature carries on continually in every place a beneficent ministry of healing the wounds that have been inflicted upon her. She follows the footsteps of man and strives to obliterate the ravages he causes. The blasted rocks that have been exposed on the hillside she soon plants with her self-sown trees and shrubs, and hides their deformity. The stone wall which in its newness and rawness looks such a discordant feature in the landscape, she subdues by the gray colouring and the soft tenderness of her lichens and mosses into beautiful harmony with the surrounding scenery. The battlefield that has been trampled and disfigured by the fury of the combatants, and strewn with the shattered remains of humanity, she converts into golden cornfields and smiling meadows, which look like a scene of immemorial peace. Nature follows in the track of the terrible volcanic eruption, and in a short time brings beauty out of ashes, disintegrates the lava that has desolated a fair province into rich soil, out of which may spring up more luxuriant fruitfulness than before. And so the goodness and mercy of our God following on our

heels can transmute the very consequences of our sins into Divine forms of beauty and joy. Some time ago, on board a receiving ship in Brooklyn, New York, the sailors gave a visitor a draught from a tank that was filled for a cruise fifty years previously, and had never since been emptied. There was a time when the water was foul and evil-smelling; but it is now as sweet as if drawn only yesterday. And so, through the kind chemistry of God's goodness and mercy, our memories of the past clarify themselves, all their impurities disappear, and they grow permanently clear and sweet. By the precious alchemy of grace, the *disappointments* of earth are changed to heaven's *appointments*, the wise and loving discipline of a Father's hand. The repented sin of David gave us the priceless legacy of the Fifty-first and the Twenty-third Psalms; the repented sin of Peter fitted him to strengthen his brethren.

And what a wonderful significance do the goodness and mercy that follow us for this gracious purpose possess! We have had higher teaching than David had. *Goodness* and *mercy* are no mere abstract qualities, no mere Divine providence to us. They are personified, and have assumed the beautiful appearance of the self-sacrificing life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. We see goodness and mercy incarnate in the form of the Saviour from sin doing all the blessed work of reparation for us. Nothing else and nothing less than the atoning

death of God's own Son could suffice to change the past of any one of us. No sacrifice less costly would avail. With the tears and the blood of Him who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners are the stains of our sins effaced. Only the holy feet that were pierced and bruised by the thorns and stones of the wilderness, could stamp out the footprints of sin and folly we had impressed upon the path of life. In the old classic story of Orestes pursued by the Furies, because he slew his mother to avenge the death of his father, whom she had murdered, we are told that he only found refuge from them when he fled to the temple of Apollo, the god of light. While he knelt at the altar the Furies slept on the altar steps—a beautiful picture, derived even from pagan sources, of an accusing conscience finding rest from all its fears and torments only in God's presence, when it owns its guilt and trusts in the atonement of Jesus. There is no power but the supreme cross of our Lord that can go back and do for us what we have left undone, and obliterate or transmute the evil we have done. And we ourselves must share in the sacrifice. We too must die to sin, must be crucified with Christ, that we may live to God. We must know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, and be baptized with His baptism; else instead of goodness and mercy following us to forgive and undo our evil, the avenger of blood will follow upon our track, and our doom will be sealed for ever.

2. But let us look for a little at the second part of my beautiful text. Not only goodness and mercy—these two white-robed messengers of God—are to follow us instead of the avenger of blood, but we are to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. The manslayer who fled to one of the old cities of refuge in Palestine had not only the right of asylum there, safety from the vengeance of the friends of the murdered man, but also the right of citizenship. Though he did not by birth belong to the city to which he fled, and had no possession in it; though his crime had made him an outcast from his own city and inheritance, his very necessity constituted a title to be received as a citizen in the new dwelling-place. And by the merciful provision of the Mosaic law, his very misery and danger raised him from the condition of a stranger and a fugitive, to be an associate with the priests of God in their holiest services.

But great as were the privileges which he enjoyed in the city of refuge, they were only temporary. He was only to dwell there till his case should be investigated by the proper authorities, or at the utmost till the death of the man who happened to be high priest at the time. He must then, if pronounced guilty, be given up to the just doom connected with his crime, or, if found innocent, depart to his own home. But it is not so with the house of the Lord, to which the Psalmist refers. David knew that the sanctuary on Zion

would be a secure place of refuge ; and often did he long with an intense yearning for its privileges, and contrast the miserable spiritual privations of his exile in the wilderness with the means of grace which he used to enjoy. But even if he had been restored to the sanctuary, he could not have said of it, "This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell ; for I have desired it." At Cadiz, in Spain, above the entrance of the Casa di Misericordia, or House of Refuge, is carved the inscription in the words of the One hundred and thirty-second Psalm—"This is my rest: here will I dwell." The ear misses the two familiar words of the Psalm "for ever." A friend has told me that as he looked up one day at the inscription and noticed the omission, the Superior, who happened to be near, with a smile explained the reason. "This Casa," he said, "is the rest of the poor—but not for ever." So with David—his place of refuge was a place of rest in sore need, but not for ever. He could not find in it all the conditions to make it the permanent home of an immortal spirit. He must some day leave the earthly house of the Lord. Death at last must separate him from it. No earthly sanctuary or city of refuge can keep out that last enemy, that final avenger of human sin. It will snatch its victims away with their hold upon the very horns of the altar. It will condemn all, innocent and guilty alike, to the same doom. And, therefore, David must have looked beyond the earthly sanctuary to

the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God; beyond the dark valley of the shadow of death to the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. There alone should he be everlastingly safe and blessed.

And all who flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them in the Gospel are safe for evermore. There is now no condemnation to them. On the mercy-seat of God's dwelling-place they behold sprinkled, not the blood that crieth out for vengeance like the blood of Abel, but the blood that cries on the cross, "Father, forgive them," and that cleanses from all sin. The wrath of God, against whom they have sinned, has been appeased; the avenger of blood is satisfied with the death in their room of their Surety and Substitute. The forgiveness of God is a forgiveness that cannot be qualified or withdrawn; it is absolute and final, for it is a forgiveness based upon the most perfect knowledge of the sin. Its real nature is known to Him, its full consequences measured and comprehended; and therefore His forgiveness is the fulfilment of the very justice and holiness of God. Trusting in the finished work of Christ, God is not merely merciful and pitiful to forgive our sins, but faithful and just. The challenge can now be made to the whole universe, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of

God, who also maketh intercession for us." From the miserable condition of criminals with the sword of justice hanging over our heads, aliens, and outcasts, we are raised to the dignity of fellow-citizenship with the saints, and are made kings and priests unto God and the Father. The fear of the fugitive is exchanged for the song of salvation ; and the gnawing reproaches of an accusing conscience and the bitter memories of remorse are dispelled by the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and a deep all-pervading sense of gratitude and joy. And we who looked back upon the weary past with feelings of distress and alarm, dreading lest our sins should rise up against us, and go before us to judgment, now see goodness and mercy following us all the days of our life.

And from this house of the Lord we shall go no more out. It will be no mere temporary refuge, but an everlasting home. There shall be gathered together all our treasures, the results of all our labour, the harvests - fruits of all our discipline. There shall be cemented anew in higher form the fellowships and friendships that made the life of earth so sweet. We fled to this house of the Lord for safety in a time of sore distress ; and we have found in it the true rest of life. We were driven by stress of trial and danger into it when all other refuge failed us, and we looked on our right hand and viewed, but there were none to know or help us ; and now so blessed are we in it that we would not

leave it if we could. No sin can accuse us there; no death can snatch us from its joy. Nothing can shake the security, nothing can mar the peace, of those who dwell thus in the house of the Lord. Goodness and mercy have wiped away all the evils of our life, and converted them into good. And "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

X

GOD'S CONTINUOUS CARE

"I will water it every moment."—ISAIAH xxvii. 3.

THE text should be translated more in accordance with the original, "I will water it moment by moment." This is a more expressive way of setting forth the truth which it contains. It is like drawing out a closed telescope, and so obtaining a clearer definition and an enlarged view. By dividing the generic phrase into its component elements, the attention is fixed more particularly upon it, and it impresses itself more deeply upon the mind. There are several other examples in the Bible, where a phrase of a similar kind gains much in fulness and comprehensiveness by a similar process of drawing it out, in accordance with the literal meaning of the original. When Pharaoh asked Jacob, "How old art thou?" the question in the original is drawn out and prolonged, as if he had said, "How many are the days of the years of thy life?" It indicates the awe and astonishment with which the Egyptian monarch gazed upon the aged patriarch, as if he were a being from another world, and the difficulty

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which he had in trying to realise the successive periods of a life so protracted. And the reply of Jacob was put into the very mould of Pharaoh's question when he said, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years." When Christ gave to His disciples His parting promise, He said, as it is translated in our version, "Lo! I am with you *alway*, even unto the end of the world." But a more literal and a far better rendering is, "Lo! I am with you *all the days*"; thus particularising the "alway," and showing that it is composed of many changes of fortune and feeling. Christ did not say simply "alway," implying only a uniform duration, but "all the days," implying that He would be with His people in all the changing circumstances of life, in days of joy and sorrow, of success and failure. And who does not feel that in this particularised form the promise is much more precious, and much better adapted to the condition of beings like us, who cannot even imagine a state of uniform peace in this world?

This process of specialising has always been a favourite mode of expression among Eastern people. They do not indulge in vague generalities. Primitive persons, by giving diminutive and pet names to the objects of their love, wish to make them peculiarly their own; to reduce them from the vast world of things, to a form small enough to make it easy to understand and love them. They do the same with their ordinary forms of speech. They love to dwell

upon minute particulars, to realise in thought all that is comprehended in a saying. And God adopts this specific method of speech, and accommodates Himself to His people's love of detail. Not *every* moment, but *moment* by *moment*, will He water His vineyard.

The parable of the vineyard is a common one in the Bible. In the prophecies of Isaiah two references to a vineyard, as applied by God to His own people, occur. They are both songs. The first is the song of the Beloved in the fifth chapter of the book, which gives a lively picture of what a spiritual vineyard was, planted in a land possessed of all the advantages that could favour holiness and outward prosperity. The prophet represents God as seeking for the natural fruit that should come of all His culture, and being grievously disappointed. It brought forth only wild grapes. The people of Israel, who were the vines of His choice and care, brought Him the fruits of their mere sinful nature, instead of those of His election and grace. In consequence of this unprofitableness, the vineyard was to be laid waste. The foreign invader would break down its walls and reduce the land to desolation ; and as the climax of His judgment, God said, "I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it." But from this period of national calamity the prophet turns to a brighter future that shall yet dawn upon the land. He proceeds from denunciation to blessing ; from images of violence to images of gentleness. He

beholds the restored land and repentant people once more as a flourishing vineyard; and he introduces into his narrative a song, like that which a watchman of a vineyard might sing to himself to relieve the monotony of his task. And this time God speaks of Himself in the song as the Watchman who will guard His vineyard night and day, and water it moment by moment. And in consequence "He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit." And once more the description would be strictly true which Moses gave of Canaan as "a land which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year."

The picture contained in the promise of the text is very graphic. In Bible lands the climate is excessively arid. Six consecutive months of drought occur regularly in summer, even in the most favourable circumstances. From May to October not a drop of rain falls; and from morn to afternoon the sun shines with unmitigated fierceness in a cloudless sky. In consequence of the continuous drought, the vegetation is in danger of being withered altogether off the face of the earth. During this season, which is the time of growth and fruitfulness, the husbandman has to be constantly busy, supplying by artificial means the moisture which cannot be obtained naturally. Every garden or vineyard is provided

with a deep well, from which he waters his vines and fruit trees; and his fields are irrigated by a system of small artificial channels, which bring the water of the aqueducts from the hills to the plants that are cultivated. This process of artificial watering must be carried on without intermission during the season, else the harvest of fruit will fail. It makes the cultivation of the soil in Eastern lands a far more laborious process than in our country, where our weeping skies do so much for the gardener. But, on the other hand, the conjunction of an almost tropical sun and an abundant supply of water produces a luxuriance of growth and fruitfulness unknown in colder and moister lands, and is a rich reward for all the exhausting toil.

The prophet drew his simple but striking figure from this method of cultivation. In accordance with the urgent necessity of His vineyard, God waters it from moment to moment. With unwearied labour, with unremitting watchfulness, He provides continuously for the wants of His people. To the unceasing shining of the sun He supplies the counteractive of an unceasing watering; and by this incessant combination of the two forces—which would otherwise be hostile apart—He produces a rich harvest of beauty and fruitfulness in His vineyard.

The idea of God watering His vineyard moment by moment, puts in a vivid symbolic form a truth of which Scripture is full, which Scripture indeed was

designed to reveal and declare—the truth of the special providence of God. It is a truth of paramount importance in our age. We hear so much in these scientific days of the reign of law, and of the doctrine of evolution, as applied not only to the formation of the earth and the development of vegetable and animal life, but even to the higher things of the mind and conscience. And many who accept it as their creed assert that there is no need for a Supreme Being, for things develop themselves by an inherent power, or by the force of circumstances. Nature is self-acting. Matter has in itself the potency of life, even the highest. There is nothing in the world but unbroken physical continuity. And it is to be feared that even in the devoutest minds, that desire to think aright on this important subject, that can accept a theistic doctrine of evolution, and see no necessary antagonism, when properly understood, between Christian philosophy and such a doctrine, as a means of accounting for the infinite variety and yet perfect order of the development of life—it seems, nevertheless, somehow or other, to remove farther from them the personal agency of God, and to create a dim haze of distance around the manifestation of His plan and purpose. The ideas of modern science, from their very magnitude and magnificence, have a tendency to exalt the conception of God's general providence at the expense of His particular. While the majestic law of universal gravitation as the mode of God's action is a

nobler conception than that which thought of God as bearing up by the help of angels the planets in their paths, it seems to make less real and vivid to us the immediate power of the Almighty arm.

With such theories and conceptions of God's method of working prevailing around us, we need to have the wholesome corrective of the precious truth contained in my text brought before us more frequently. We lose the sharp outlines of the special providence of God amid the vast spaces of the astronomer, and the long ages of the geologist, and the uniformitarian methods of the evolutionist. And therefore we need to be reminded that God watereth His vineyard moment by moment. We need to think of God, not as working in the beginning only, or on a far-off inaccessible throne of glory, but as working beside our path every day and every hour; not merely as carrying on His work behind the order of Nature, by great general laws and world-wide, age-long processes of evolution, but as personally entering into the ordinary operations of the world, and influencing the smallest details. We cannot rejoice in a supernatural that is so far off as the creation of the world, and that can only interfere in great crises. We were made for the closest relation to a personal God; and our souls cry out for God—for the living God. This is as much an instinct of our spiritual nature as the habitual belief in Nature's regularity; nay, it is a far stronger instinct.

The only belief that satisfies our reason and

our heart, is that which enables us to realise that the power by which the mechanism of the universe acts in the largest and smallest things, not only took its rise, but has its continuity, in a personal God. We are thus constitutionally prepared for the Scriptural miraculous, which assures us that He who is so great and so far off that all differences of space and size vanish before Him, is yet very near to every soul that calleth upon Him; that while He hath given all things their law, He yet stoopeth down in the minuteness of His administration to number the very hairs of our head, and to mark the fall of every sparrow to the ground. The nature that God has given to us is prepared—if we do not thwart it—to believe that He has come down to us in His written Word, so full of the Divine majesty and holiness, so full at the same time of our own homely human experience; that He has come nearer to us still, when His own Son out of His bosom came into our world and into our flesh, took upon Himself our sins and sorrows, making Himself our atoning sacrifice, ascending into the highest heavens to carry on the work of grace more effectually, and bearing with Him to the throne of glory a heart that can be touched with a fellow-feeling of our infirmities. With such a belief there is no vastness in which any of us can be lost or forgotten. "I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine."

This, then, is what is implied in the gracious words of the text, "I will water it moment by moment";

not every moment merely, as implying a uniform duration or continuance, but moment by moment as taking account of the changes in circumstances or feelings which each moment may bring about. This interpretation of the text combines the two theories of Providence which see God in the working of wise and eternal laws, and in special interpositions. There is the unbroken succession of His dealings with us, and there is the continual though not arbitrary disturbance.

By this method of dealing with us, we are saved from the deadening influence of sameness and uniformity. Continuous enjoyment of anything takes away from the vivid consciousness of it. It takes its place among accustomed things, and so attracts no notice and excites no special feeling. But when we are said to be watered moment by moment, this uniformity is continually interrupted. There is a constant beginning and a constant ending. It is a chain of providence with each link rounded and completed before it is added on to the next. God begins for us a new work each moment—not merely carries on the old. And thus we feel that His mercies are new to us not only every morning, but also every moment.

When the Eternal God is to do anything in the natural world, He can only do it moment by moment. He must, so to speak, come under the conditions of time and space. He limits Himself. He will only fill up the ocean drop by drop; pile up the earth

atom by atom. I remember being greatly impressed with this idea when gazing upon a huge stalagmite or pillar of limestone, which looked like the great trunk of a tree, formed on the floor of a cave by the slow falling of a single drop of water from the roof. What ages it must have taken to deposit that enormous pillar—long ages, drawn out drop by drop, minute by minute interminably! It is in such a way that He who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, works with infinite patience from moment to moment in the field of Nature and of human life. He will only produce His plants and animals cell by cell. Our bodily life can only grow by the smallest increments. We live from moment to moment only. Our life is a succession of heart-beats; time is dealt out to us in moments, as each grain of sand runs through the narrow neck of the hour-glass. And in our physical body we are dying not only daily, but moment by moment; and moment by moment our structure has to be renewed. Every movement of our body, every exercise of a muscle or nerve, every thought of our brain, involves the death of some particle or other of which our body is composed; and this loss has to be repaired by the formation of new particles. God thus keeps us in life, maintains the integrity of our bodily frame, and fits us for carrying on all the functions of our bodily and mental life moment by moment.

Nor was it otherwise when God came out from behind the veil of nature, and revealed Himself to us

in our own form and experience, as the incarnate Saviour. He said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." He did not carry on His redemptive work on earth by great crises and remarkable incidents and miracles, but by the quiet experiences and ordinary details of daily life. He filled every minute to the brim. He put His heart into every moment; and so the world has not yet been able fully to understand the meaning of what He said and did in three short years. And so it is that God ministers to our spiritual life, not by fits and starts, on great occasions, but moment by moment. He carries on the work of grace in us by a process of slow increments. Each spiritual exercise involves a dying unto sin and a living unto righteousness; a death of what is old and effete, and a continual substitution of what is new. And for this carrying on of the work of grace we need the continual help of the Holy Spirit. There is no storing up of grace for future emergencies; no provision of help made beforehand for times of need. We get the grace at the moment that we require it, and the help in the time of need. "He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned."

No matter how long and intense the drought, there is a deep well in every Eastern garden from which the husbandman can water his vines continually. And no matter how great may be the necessity, how dire the trouble in our case, in Christ Jesus there is an infinite fulness from which He will supply all

our need, and give us grace for grace—grace from Him in correspondence to our longing for grace, in correspondence to our capacity to receive it. His saving grace is not limited to the moment of a grand deliverance once for all—the single experience. It is a constant bestowing of faith from moment to moment. It is a present influence stimulating our energies, a present wisdom regulating our conduct, a present love enriching and sweetening our life, a present deliverance in every time of need. Each changing moment, determined as it is by His own providence, will have the special help which it requires. The moment of grief will have its consolation; the moment of darkness its light; the moment of doubt its evidence of faith; the moment of loneliness its assurance of the all-sufficing presence of Jesus; the moment of difficulty the way of escape; the moment of temptation the power to overcome it; and the moment of death—but there is no room for death in such continuous supervision, for he that liveth and believeth in Christ shall never die—but call it death, and it is only "absent from the body and present with the Lord." "As thy day, so shall thy strength be" will always be true. Nay more, when He is justly angry with us because of our carelessness and worldliness, and He says to us, as He said to the idolatrous Israelites at the foot of Sinai, "I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee," He assures us in another part of His Word that His anger endureth but a moment. "For a

small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee." In the very midst of wrath and apparent forsaking, His love never ceases for a moment; and behind the cloud of sin which seems to have come between Him and us, He is yearning for our return to Him, and working to bring us back, and manifesting Himself to us still as our Father and Redeemer.

The Apostle Paul based his argument for contentment with our lot upon God's word: "For he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." It is singular that these words do not occur in any part of the Bible. Words bearing some resemblance to them are found in the Old Testament, but not the actual words themselves. But though the exact expression is not in the Bible, it is what the Bible implies in every chapter. It is the spirit of its whole revelation. To St. Paul himself God gave a special form of the promise, "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee." In the original the meaning of the promise is far more expressive. It should be translated not "and he said"—as if referring to something past—but "and he is saying," as implying a perpetual present. It is a continuous saying; for the Apostle needed to hear it not once for all, as if his troubles were to be speedily ended; but continually, for the thorn in the flesh was not removed, but wounded him all his life. As long as the trouble endured, so long did he hear the answer of God to his prayer. Every day of his life, every

moment of each day, while the pain and privation reminded him forcibly of the thorn in the flesh, they also reminded him forcibly of the comforting words of God. And so it is in the experience of every one who has the faith of Paul. God's grace becomes ours at the very time when, and in proportion as, we need it. The reference is not to a grace past that was once sufficient, or to a future grace that shall be sufficient, but to a present grace that is sufficient at this very moment. God's grace ever keeps pace with God's providence. His providence never outruns His grace. We believe that the trials and necessities and changes of our life are of God's wise and gracious appointment. They are ordained by One who cannot pervert justice, who is too wise to err, and who so loved us that He gave His only Son for us. Were the trial of our life, therefore, to come upon us without the comfort, the necessity without the help, the difficulty and danger without the way of escape, we should have to believe that God's providence placed His people in circumstances in which His grace was not available. But we know that this cannot be. Providence and grace co-operate together for the good of His people; and with every temptation He provides the way of escape.

Job in his tragic sorrows said, "What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? and that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?" Is frail man in this fleeting life of threescore years

and ten worth all this notice? It seems beneath the greatness of the Almighty thus to treat a withered fallen leaf, driven to and fro by the wind. Man is hardly enough treated by fate in ordinary circumstances without God interfering specially to make his lot still more wretched. This was the querulous complaint wrung from Job in the lowest depths of his unexampled misery; and it is one that is often wrung from ourselves under the pressure of great calamities, when we feel as if our sufferings were overdone, as if the experiment of discipline were far too costly. It is widely different from the apparently similar exclamation of the Psalmist, who contrasts the magnificence of Nature with the insignificance of man, and feels it to be an altogether wonderful and adorable thing, that the great God who made the sublime glories of the heavens should condescend to interest Himself in the trivial affairs of individual men—"What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" The key to the true understanding of both utterances—of the interference of God alike in the way of chastening as Job conceived of Him, and of blessing as David conceived of Him—is found in the words of the Psalmist, "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels; Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour." It is not because of the insignificance, but because of the greatness, of his nature that God deals with him in such a minute, personal, continuous manner.

God wishes to magnify man; and therefore He sets him free from the limitations and disabilities of his nature by suffering. He sets him free not *from* suffering, but *through* suffering. He makes the sorrows of his life to be themselves the causes of the widening and the enriching of his nature; so that he can say with thankfulness, even of the trials that seemed most to have impoverished and narrowed his life—"Thou hast enlarged me in distress." And so with the continual blessings of life, the design of God is to magnify man through them; for as God Himself is essential happiness, it is when we enjoy that which is alone true essential bliss, that we are nearest to Him and most like Him; and our present joy connects itself with our future eternal joy, as the sunbeam traces itself to the sun. It is in order that we should not forget Him, as we are so apt to do amid the distractions and engagements of worldly things, that He is visiting us every morning, and trying us every moment. Human life made in the image of God and redeemed by the blood of His Son, is far too precious to be the sport of chance or caprice—to be abandoned by God even for a single instant. Let the thought, then, of God's watering His vineyard moment by moment inspire us with a sense of the sacredness of our being and the grandeur of our destiny.

And what a heaven's cure for earth's care is the promise of the text! We are naturally full of fears and anxieties regarding the future, and we should

like to be insured against what may happen. But what better assurance can we have, than that He in whose hands are our times will water us moment by moment, provide for the want of each moment as it occurs. We should like to see beforehand the way of escape out of any temptation that may befall us ; but it requires the very pressure of temptation against it, as it were, to force open the door of escape. We should like to see how we are to be delivered in difficulty ; but it is only as we advance that the hills, which seem to shut us in as in a blind glen, open up and disclose a way ; it is only as we put our feet into the very waters that the Red Sea parts before us, and we cross over on dry land. God Himself has brought us into these straits because through them lies the path to the freedom and enlargement in store for us. We should like to have spiritual provision stored up for many years to come, as Joseph stored up the abundance of the plentiful years for the years of famine ; but we are beggars living from hand to mouth, dependent entirely upon God's bounty, having to pray continually, "Give us day by day our daily bread." We should like to see all the path of the just, in the full blaze of the shining light, from its commencement to its end, as we gaze back from the summit of a hill upon the path we have traversed, and see all its turns and windings beneath us at a single glance ; but such a Pisgah view is not permitted to us until we have actually completed the journey. We

must advance step by step, and say with the poet—

> Keep Thou my feet ; I do not ask to see
> The distant scene ; one step enough for me.

In all the drought of earth the Lord will water thee moment by moment. Why then shouldest thou have a care when God is thus caring for thee? Why should the future, with all its possibilities and certainties, alarm thee, when moment by moment as you advance into it, you have the guarantee that God is going before you step by step, and breaking up your way? There is no opportunity for the evil of the world to have power over thee. Nothing can evade that sleepless watchfulness to harm thee. It is not the substance of trying things that thou bearest, but the shadow—the burden of sin pardoned, of sorrow comforted and turned into joy, of the world overcome, of death with the sting taken out of it, of the grave with the captivity of it led captive. Surely all who realise the full significance of the promise of the text, should have at all times the perfect peace of the mind that is stayed upon God!

And what ought to be the condition of a vine that is watered moment by moment? Should not the husbandman look for a rich return of fruitfulness from it? Should it not, like the tree that is planted by a river, whose roots are always bathed in the life-giving tide, yield its fruit in its season, and yet retain, contrary to the usual habit of nature, its leaves in an unfading state? God has a right to expect

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from those who are so graciously dealt with a return of an hundredfold. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." Let your estimate of life, then, be measured not by what you think of years and days, but by what you think of moments. Live your life of faith moment by moment; and moment by moment God will water you, and will refresh your soul with new communications of His grace.

XI

CHRISTIAN SOCIAL LIFE

"We are members one of another."—EPHES. iv. 25.

ONE of the most remarkable methods of preventing the encroachments of the sea upon the land, and fixing the loose sand along the shore, is by means of plants specially adapted for the purpose. These plants belong mostly to the grass tribe, though some are furnished with the flowers and foliage of higher orders. But they all possess in common the peculiarity of creeping underground stems, which at short intervals send up fresh shoots above the surface, and root themselves in the soil. These creeping underground stems enable them to subsist in the barren sand, and endure long periods of drought and sterility; while the rooting of the stems at frequent intervals, producing new individuals at every joint, all linked together, enables them to offer an effectual resistance to the storm. If undisturbed, these wonderfully-constructed plants would speedily cover the largest tract of sea-shore spontaneously, prevent the loose masses of sand thrown up by the waves

from drifting, and render the soil sufficiently stable to support higher vegetation.

Man has taken advantage of the peculiar habit of these seaside plants, and planted them along the banks which he erects as a barrier against the sea, and which without these would be blown away by the first hurricane. The enormous dykes which the people have constructed in Holland, to keep out the inundations of the German Ocean, owe their stability to these plants, which are carefully protected by the Government; and along the low eastern side of England, where the sea is seeking continually to encroach upon the shore, and is with great difficulty kept back, a large quantity of dry land has in this way been reclaimed from the waters.

It is the social habit of these seaside plants that gives them their wonderful tenacity of life, and admirably adapts them for the conditions in which they grow. Each separate plant is weak and fragile; and if left to itself it would speedily perish in its sterile situation, and would be uprooted and swept away by the fury of the tide. But when linked and interlaced in the closest fashion, by a vital bond, with the whole mass of similar plants growing around, it can hold its own against the strongest forces of the ocean. It is as nearly indestructible from natural causes as anything can be; and it is one of the most striking proofs of the power of feeble things that are endowed with life,

when in combination, to resist the mightiest forces of mechanical nature.

We may learn a wise lesson from this herb of the field if we consider how it grows, and apply the parable of its peculiar mode of growth to our own religious life. What we have to do as Christians in the world is akin to the work of the seaside grass. We have to prevent the encroachments of error, to beat back the waves of evil, to resist the storms of temptation, and to win new additions to the kingdom of righteousness and peace. And we can only do this, in the high realm of spiritual life, in the same way that the seaside grass does its task in the lower realm of physical nature, viz. by association. As the grass-plants are members one of another by means of the creeping and rooting stems that connect them together, and make of all the plants spread over a wide area but one plant in reality, so Christians are members one of another by means of the faith and love in Christ Jesus that unite them together, and make of them, however numerous and widely scattered, one body in the Lord.

It is true indeed that the Christian religion is intensely personal. It brings out into high relief the individuality of every human being more than anything else. Its chief and constant appeal is to the individual conscience. Its salvation is a salvation of the individual soul. It separates a man from the mass of his fellow-creatures, and brings

him into personal relations and transactions with the living God. There may be communion of worldly goods, but spiritual gifts from their very nature can only be personal possessions. And the design of all the means of grace is to make a man realise his individuality, with all the solemn responsibilities connected with it. Every man must bear his own burden; every man must give an account of himself to God.

But while this is profoundly true, we must not at the same time lose sight of the fact that the Christian religion is intensely social. Its design is to form the one perfect society of earth and heaven. For the origin of the social element in religion we must go back to Eden, when God said, "It is not good for man to be alone" — even though he had the high society of the Godhead and of the angel world — and provided for him a partner with whom his own nature and experience would be completed, and he would be best fitted to worship and serve God. And after the fall, God's purposes and man's thoughts were directed, not to the restoration of the lost Garden of Eden, with its solitary pair, but to the formation of the City of God, a far larger community than could exist in Eden. The Bible is a continuous description of the preparation of this City — the perfecting not only of man's personal life, but also of his social life; the constituting anew, by the work of grace, not only of the relations of man to God, but also of those

of man to man, which sin had destroyed. Men are taught and trained on the ground both of the Law and the Gospel to love God supremely, and to love one another with pure hearts fervently. Love is ever represented as the end of the law and the prophets, and as more than all sacrifices and ceremonials of religion.

When M. Bemontier tried to plant the Landes, a barren waste of ever-shifting sand bordering the Bay of Biscay, he found that his young pine trees would not take hold of the loose soil in which they were planted, against the unbroken force of the fierce Atlantic storms. It occurred to him to try the experiment of sowing along with the pine seeds the seeds of the common broom, whose hardy stems would protect the tiny sapling until it could stand by itself. The result surpassed hope. Pine forests, originally protected by broom bushes, protecting in their turn their own young scions, sprang up and covered the barren Landes with valuable timber. They had fixed the soil securely, broken the force of the winds, and ameliorated the climate. And thus, as in the natural world it needed the pine and the broom to help each other in reclaiming the dreary waste, so in the human world it is necessary that two should be associated to reclaim the moral wilderness to Christ —two often of different characters. The one helps the other. The one gives confidence and stimulus to the other. It is a suggestive fact that the

Christian religion did not begin with one believer, but with two. John, the last prophet of the old Covenant, when he met with the Fulfiller of all prophecy, handed over to Him two of his own disciples. In all likelihood, if there had been only one disciple, he would not have taken this critical step beyond the Baptist to follow the Lord; but the two were helpful to each other. One of them was Andrew, and he findeth his brother Simon Peter, and saith unto him, "We"—for his companion was still in his company — "we have found the Christ," and he brought him to Jesus. Thus the tie of flesh and blood was made, according to the natural order, and according to God's appointment, the channel of grace; and the Gospel course, starting in the home, proceeded along the lines marked out by the relations of human life.

The next day Jesus found Philip, and Philip found Nathaniel, and so the missionary spirit spread, and the great gathering of the disciples began. We have here the rudiments of church life; for the disciples found a new society when they found Christ. Each new disciple that joined the Lord was joined in Him to all the other disciples. His new relationship to Christ brought him into a new relationship with his brethren. And thus having begun as a social institution, Christianity grew and spread, like the seaside grass, as a society of disciples—all united by a vital tie, of whom Christ was the Head, and His teaching and work the main substance of

their fellowship. Differing from one another, as they differed from all outside, their very differences helped their unity and influenced each other. There were subordinate groups and divisions among them; but these no more interfered with the harmony of their spiritual association, than the differentiation of their bodies into two eyes, or two hands, or five fingers and toes, broke up the unity of their natural life. One was their Master, and they were all brethren, members one of another.

In less than four years after the two found the Messiah, we read that three thousand souls continued in the teaching and fellowship of the Apostles; and all that believed were together, united in a way before unknown, not by the surface affections and interests which are called into everyday activity by the common concerns of life, but by those pure religious feelings which are planted deep down in man's nature, beyond the reach of all selfish considerations. The essential rudiments of a church which we find in the first small company of the disciples, expanded into the full form of the Christian Church after the resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit, and the establishing of the apostolic preaching and order. And the Church has been in existence ever since, extending itself wherever the lifting up of Jesus Christ and Him crucified by the preaching of the Gospel has drawn men to Him, and to one another in Him.

We thus see that a true representation of the matter is not that Christians have social needs and

duties, but that the very essence of Christianity is social. The social element is as much a part of its nature, as its social habit is part of the constitution of the seaside grass. It cannot exist without it. Believers are invariably regarded not as separate sheep, but as a flock; not as stones scattered about, but as built up together into a habitation of God through the Spirit; not as isolated plants, but as branches in the True Vine; not as solitary individuals, living each for himself, but as fellow-citizens of the saints and of the household of God.

The Christian religion sanctifies the social feelings, and presents to them new objects of interest and attachment. A man cannot, indeed, be a complete Christian by himself. There will be much in God and Christ which he cannot understand; for it is only "with all saints" that he can know the length and breadth and height and depth of the love that passeth knowledge, and be filled with all the fulness of God. There will be parts of his own nature that will not be called forth into exercise; there will be affections that will remain dormant or rudimentary in religious loneliness. To live a Christian life in the solitude of one's own heart, is an attempt entirely foreign to the nature of the Christian religion. If we are not to sink into selfishness, or into a selfish pursuit of our own religious interests, we must recognise our oneness with each other.

And as a man cannot be a complete Christian by himself, so no church can be a complete church that

isolates itself from its sister churches in the same Gospel. As the history of each individual believer is comprehended in a larger history than his own, so each church is a part of the universal Church of Christ, and all the churches supplement each other. Charity is the bond of perfectness that makes them members one of another, and unites them all together. And when its work is accomplished, it will gather from all the churches and from all the ages the perfect society of the kingdom of heaven.

Thus the social element belongs to the very essence of Christianity. It is not as individuals only that we have to do with God and with the concerns of the soul and of eternity. We are taught in the Bible that God is a covenant God, blessing the children for the sake of the father, and linking the generations of His covenant people together with His faithfulness and mercy. We are taught that Jesus is the Son of Man, and becomes the Redeemer of our several persons because He is already the Redeemer of our common race. We are taught that as believers we are members of Christ's body, of His flesh, and of His bones, and therefore members one of another in Him. If we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ we shall not only be saved ourselves, but also our house. If you dig up a plant of seaside grass from the sand, you find that it is connected with a neighbouring plant by a runner, and that it gives out itself a runner which connects it with another plant, and so on ; and you thus find that the whole mass

of this singular vegetation covering all the sea-shore is one vast corporate body, one multitudinous plant, all whose individual members are inseparably bound together. And so there is no selfish salvation in Jesus Christ. A man cannot be saved without wishing and helping to save some one else. We are bound to each other by tendrils of affection and runners of help; and the world which Christ saves is one in which varied activities and manifold kinds of character are at work together for the general good.

Without this social element, Christianity would have been uprooted and withered long ago. It could no more withstand the temptations and privations of the world, and the aridity of the dry and parched land where it has so often to grow, than a single plant of sea-grass along the shore could withstand the fury of the winds and waves, or maintain itself in the dry and bitter sand. Believers must be members one of another, must join hand in hand, if they are to be fortified against the evil influences of the world, and to carry on the schemes of Christian benevolence, for which they have received the Divine calling in their own salvation. It requires more courage than most individuals possess, to do single-handed what is right, whatever may be the consequences; but when believers are supported by others like-minded with themselves, they acquire great confidence. In the natural world, among objects that individually are insignificant, vast effects are

produced by combination. A single moss would never be able to resist the storms of the Alpine rock on which it grows; but forming a dense, wide-spreading tuft, the wind sweeps over it in vain. The pine tree on the mountain height, or the heather on the bleak moorland, live in colonies to accomplish by united support what they could not do singly. And naturalists have observed that where flowers are individually small, and have but a faint perfume and a small store of honey, they combine with multitudes of others of their kind and form large clusters and masses, whose colour becomes in consequence conspicuous at a distance, and whose perfume fills the air, so that insects are readily attracted to fertilise them. And in the human world we see how necessary co-operation is in carrying out useful schemes and supporting benevolent institutions. And so it is by the united work of the churches, that the ministry of the Word and the ordinances of religion are supported and perpetuated year after year and generation after generation. If the whole grass of the sea-shore springs from a single root, so Christianity itself is such a manifold growth in affiliated parts. The old Scandinavian myth of the Universal Tree is not far from the true conception of the Church of Christ, which He Himself significantly described when He said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches," and when He compared the kingdom of heaven to the growth of the mustard tree. It is not a mechanism, but an organism.

There is a strong tendency in these days to ignore the social nature of Christianity altogether, or to make light of it. Individualism in everything, but especially in religion, is the special outgrowth of our time. There are disintegrating forces at work breaking to pieces the old covenant ideas of the Christian faith, and separating individuals from each other in working out their salvation, instead of binding them to each other more closely. There seems to be a revolt against existing institutions, and a strong desire to individualise our work and worship, in opposition to the true spirit of the Church. We see professedly religious societies springing up outside of the Church, working on different lines, and seeking to undermine its authority and usefulness. Christ is thus preached of envy and strife; feelings of rivalry, of bitterness, and uncharitableness are fostered in the minds of the people instead of brotherly love. In Ceylon the number of ruined shrines near busy centres of population strikes the traveller with astonishment, and creates the impression that Buddhism has lost its hold upon the people, and is decaying. But the real cause of these shrines being neglected is, that it is considered far more meritorious to build a new temple, than to maintain an old one in efficiency. It is the same reason that accounts for the number of old mosques in Cairo. It is a custom among Mohammedans as among Buddhists never to have a religious structure repaired; and so when it begins to give way the people build a new one,

and leave the old one to its fate. And is this not the way in which too much of the Christian work of the present day is carried on? There is more outward show and apparent success in starting new agencies, than in keeping useful and vigorous the ones already in existence.

As members one of another, united in a spiritual brotherhood, it is obvious that certain social duties necessarily spring from this association. The first and most important of these duties is obviously that of public worship. No command is more necessary than the apostolic precept, "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together," for none is more frequently and extensively disobeyed. Persons say that they can worship God at home as well as in church. No doubt they can; but it may be more than doubted whether the persons who urge that excuse do actually worship God at home. Christians have religious duties to perform in two relations equally important—duties as individuals, and duties as members of a corporate body; and the fact that they perform one set does not exempt them from the performance of the other. We are to worship God, not only as single persons, but also as members one of another. And it is the Christian custom of common worship that has consecrated the Christian Sabbath—made it not a day of rest merely, but a religious day. Our joining together in the services of the sanctuary, communicates to the whole assembly of worshippers

qualities which as individuals they do not possess. It is well known that when chemical substances are united, properties appear in the combination which were not found in the separate elements. The colour, the taste, the quality is different. What was latent in the elements becomes apparent in the compound, and what was dormant in the parts is active in the whole. And so, when we worship together as members one of another, thoughts and emotions cherished in common become warmer and more animated. We stimulate one another; and the bringing of us together is not merely the mechanical summing up of our separate capabilities, but is the chemical development, as it were, of a new and different power. If, instead of absenting ourselves from the church services, we all came to them regularly and with prepared hearts, how much more fervent and useful would our common worship be!

The Apostle in the text uses the fact that the Ephesian converts whom he addressed were members one of another, as a reason for their putting away lying, and speaking every man truth with his neighbour. As newly converted heathens, accustomed under their old religion to the grossest falsehoods; as Easterns, who had not the sense of the despicableness of a lie which even worldly-minded Western people have, the Apostle had to remind them continually that truthfulness was absolutely essential to union and co-operation — was one

of the firmest bonds of brotherhood. We do not need, to the same extent and in the same way, to be warned against the special sin of the Ephesian Church. And yet is not the religious social world among us too often a nursery of falsehood and a school of scandal? How often is social peace destroyed by false insinuations and by the tongue of malice! How often are sacred friendships destroyed and hearts embittered, owing to the want of transparent truthfulness of speech and honesty of conduct between fellow-members! Ill-natured gossip is one of the most fruitful sources of discord in the Church, doing more harm than all other causes put together; and it is absolutely impossible that we can be, or continue in any real Christian sense, members one of another if we are guilty of this form of untruthfulness.

People often complain that our churches are cold and selfish; that the members are strangers to each other; that they sit side by side in the same pew Sunday after Sunday, and never exchange a single friendly word with each other before or after service. In so far as this reproach is applicable to us, let us endeavour to remove it. Let us be kindly affectioned one to another when we meet, not only in church, but in the ordinary business and intercourse of life. Let us show that the unselfish and amiable religion of our Lord Jesus Christ is moulding our character and conduct in all things. Let us prove that the ties which bind us together

are not merely temporary ties which touch only part of our being, and concern only this life, but ties of faith and love in Christ Jesus which have regard to our whole nature and existence, and endure for evermore.

As members one of another, Christians must be mutually courteous and considerate. In a social capacity individuals cannot always have their own way. A single tree in a wide park may expand its branches as much as it can; but growing in a wood among other trees of the same kind, it must restrict its growth and accommodate itself to the requirements of its neighbours. It must allow them also fair access to heavenly air and light, and room to grow. We must yield a little even when we ought to have our right. We must let our moderation, or, as it should be translated, our *yieldingness*, be known unto all men, where principle is not concerned, but only self-interest.

Many members act harshly and say hard things to each other more from want of consideration than from any bad feeling. They do not place themselves in the position of others, and realise how they themselves would feel in like circumstances. In nothing does a man's Christianity display itself more beautifully than in his refined courtesy and his gentle consideration for all men. May we ever remember that Christ came into the world, that He founded and preserves His Church from age to age in the world, in order to move men to love, to help,

to save each other. And linked together, like the seaside grass, by mutual vital runners of faith and love in Christ Jesus, the individual nurtured up for the brotherhood, and provoking one another unto all good works, we shall be able to take up arms against a sea of troubles, beat back the evil tides of the world, and win and cultivate a fair heritage for Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

XII

A BURDENSOME STONE

"And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people."—ZECH. xii. 3.

IN the Highlands of Perthshire there is a famous boulder, or round stone, locally known by the name of the Bodach, or Old Man. It was used as a test of strength in ancient times. When a young man wished to be numbered among the athletes of the district, he was called upon to lift this stone and place it on a pedestal of rock beside it, about three feet above the ground. It was a severe test, because the stone was not only very large and heavy, but also slippery, and, owing to its roundness, gave no purchase or holding point. Most persons could not move the stone at all, and only a few could raise it a few inches from the ground. Art was required as well as strength; and sometimes the slim little man succeeded when the heavy strong man failed. This custom in prehistoric times was very widespread. Throughout Palestine the young men of the primitive race exercised themselves in the same way as the natives did in the Scottish glen.

Large round stones were kept in the villages, near the shrines of worship, as tests of strength. He who lifted such a stone highest, or set it upon its appointed pedestal, was declared the victor, and had special rights and privileges as his reward. Jerome mentions that he had seen a heavy globe of brass in Athens, which was employed to test the strength of the wrestlers, none being admitted as candidates at the public games who could not lift this globe. And we are told that when the Christian slaves taken by the Algerine pirates were sold in the market-place, they were compelled to lift a particular stone placed there for the purpose of testing their strength.

It is to this well-known custom that the prophet alludes. He compares Jerusalem to one of these testing-stones, which the nations around tried to lift, and found themselves foiled in their utmost efforts. Siege after siege was sustained, but the enemy was baffled; or, if it did prevail, its temporary victory resulted in greater loss, and often in final ruin. From the day when David conquered the old fortress of Jebus, and made it the capital of his kingdom, it defied and repelled every invader who sought to fit the stone of Jerusalem into any of the political structures which they wished to erect. It was so impregnable that the Psalmist spoke of Mount Zion as a place which could not be moved, but abideth for ever. Its fortifications were so lofty and massive that they were the wonder of all beholders, and far surpassed everything else of the kind in the world.

They were formed of enormous blocks so exactly fitted to one another, that the whole fortress looked like one huge rock. Well might David, rejoicing in the strength and security of his capital, allude in enthusiastic language to these remarkable features as fitting symbols of the Divine protection, and to the awe with which they struck the minds of those monarchs who came to besiege the city, when they first beheld them. "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised is the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. . . . For lo! the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail. . . . Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death."

It is notorious in history how frequently Jerusalem was made a burdensome stone to all who attempted to lift it and place it upon their own pedestal, and make it part of their own dominions. It was the testing-stone of the strength of all the nations. They all wanted to possess it because of its unique advantages. The conquest of it was considered the greatest crown of glory that could be put upon a

monarch's head. He who could enter its gates in triumph could lift up his head above all contemporary warriors. There was a power more than human supposed to defend it, an awful sanctity connected with it; and victory gained over it was therefore considered a victory not only over man, but over the gods themselves. It is a remarkable fact that the Holy Land has been alternately owned by almost every race of man. All the families of mankind have in turn ruled over it,—as if to symbolise its connection with the highest interests of man, and to indicate that it was the bond of union by which all the nations were to be blessed. And it is equally remarkable that the Holy City has ever been a bone of contention among all the families of the earth, and has passed into the possession of all the principal nations in turn. One after another they measured their strength against it, and to them all it proved a burdensome stone. If after terrible exertions they partially lifted it off its site, it fell and crushed their feet. And this because the Lord of Hosts was against them. It was the gravitation of heaven that gave that remarkable stone the weight and solidity which baffled its enemies. It belonged to the kingdom which cannot be moved. The strength of man could not prevail against it, because the strength of God was in it. It was He who built it so compactly together. The name by which He Himself was known was the "Stone of Israel"; and He imparted to it His own stability and enduringness and power of resistance.

The monument of God's goodness and faithfulness, Jerusalem would never have been overthrown or lifted off its rocky pedestal, had it fulfilled the Divine purpose in its erection; had it proved itself worthy of the sacred trust committed to it as the citadel of Divine truth; had its temple sanctified it, and its people been all righteous as God meant them to be. We have David's graphic description of what ought to be the character and conduct of those who should be counted worthy to be citizens of the Holy City: "Who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour." And had the inhabitants of the city maintained this high moral ideal; had the city carried out faithfully this stern exclusion of all that was mean and base, this noble intolerance of all the social and personal evils that sap the strength of a race; had the people generally walked in their house with a perfect heart, as David resolved to do,—then the city would have remained throned on its high rock, invincible and invulnerable for ever. He who entered it with the procession of the ark, when the ancient gates of Jebus were called upon to lift up their heads, to receive a greater Potentate than had ever before passed beneath them—even the King of Glory—would have made it His perpetual abode. God

would have been its refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. It would have had no cause to fear though the earth should be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. But, alas! it soon lost its sanctity, and became the seat of worldliness and covetousness. And therefore God forsook it, and it became weak as other cities. The very strength upon which it prided itself proved its destruction, and the Assyrians came and razed the city to its foundations, and carried away its people captive.

When afterwards the Lord permitted them to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, for a little space the inhabitants profited by the lessons of adversity, and established on the holy hill of Zion once more the pure worship of God; and then the city was impregnable. All through the wars of the Maccabees, it was defended by its heroic citizens with unexampled courage and devotion. They performed prodigies of valour that brought back the memory of the grand days of Joshua and Gideon. The power of faith triumphed in the tremendous struggle. "By faith they escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." But as the years rolled on, the inhabitants of Jerusalem took unhallowed advantage of their sense of security, and of the favour which God had shown to them. Once more the old presumptuous pride and worldliness took possession of them, and corrupted the worship

of the living and true God; and in our Saviour's time we see to what depth of degradation the Holy City had sunk. It had become the shrine of the most finished religious conventionalism and Pharisaic hypocrisy the world has ever seen. It had become obnoxious to God. It provoked the fierce vengeance of Rome. This champion athlete of the world, before whom all other nations had been subdued, tried its strength against the burdensome stone of Jerusalem; and in the terrible siege which our Lord foretold, and likened to the judgment of the Last Day, the Roman army overthrew its bulwarks, and left not one stone upon another.

But though God used the wicked as His sword wherewith to punish His own people, He did not allow them to escape the punishment which their own evil deeds deserved. He destroyed the destroyer; and to those who succeeded in lifting the sacred stone off its lofty site, it proved indeed a burdensome stone. It not only exhausted their strength, its fall proved their ruin. No weapon that was formed against the Holy City ever prospered. The Assyrian empire perished, and the Roman empire has vanished; and all the nations that have been conspicuous in persecuting the covenant people have declined from their former high position, and sunk into obscurity. This burdensome stone has been a millstone round the neck of every people by whom an offence against the Israel of God has come, which has sunk them into the depths of the sea.

And like the Holy City has been the Church, in which the spiritual idea of the old Jerusalem is reproduced and continued. It is the pillar and ground of truth, the citadel for the maintenance and defence of the faith once delivered to the saints. To worldly men who have endeavoured to make it the centre and pivot of their ambitious schemes, it has ever proved a burdensome stone. Statesmen have ever and anon sought through its means for the Divine sanction and blessing upon their selfish policies. They have mixed it up with earthly institutions, and placed it on the same level; and in return for the support which they have required from it, they have invested it with worldly pomp and material gifts. In so far as they have done this, they have not only undermined its true influence, but their evil work has recoiled upon themselves. The mixture of church-craft and state-craft, like the incongruous mixture of the iron and clay in the feet of Nebuchadnezzar's statue, has ever been a source of weakness and not of strength. All who have regarded and used the Church in this way—as a mere human organisation, rooted solely in the powers and policies of the world, and not as a kingdom of God whose authority is not derived from this world—have found this spiritual stone unadaptable and unmanageable. Lifted out of its own proper position and made to serve as the keystone in the arch of some political system which man has built, so far from making the arch more secure, it has endangered

its safety, and in due time it has brought it to the ground. The stone which Constantine the Great made the chief corner-stone of his political structure broke the proud Roman empire founded upon it to pieces. The exaltation of the Church above the State, which was the great Hildebrand's dream of a world-wide Christian empire, prepared the way for the downfall of the papal kingdom; and when the Pope of Rome claimed to be a temporal sovereign, he but undermined the foundations upon which his spiritual authority was based. And all who among ourselves make the Church the instrument of worldly ambition or expediency, will find it to be indeed a burdensome stone. Like the fabled stone of Sisyphus, which he rolled up the hill only to roll down again, they will find their efforts baffled when they seem most successful, and their plans made abortive when they are about to be fulfilled; and the stone in its fall will seriously bruise and injure those who wished to put it in a place for which it was not designed.

But there is another extreme. While some would cut off the heavenly connection of the Church, and bring their human authority to bear upon it, in order to win outward homage and support for it; others would wish to separate it altogether from earthly institutions, and to regard it as an exclusively spiritual association. Misunderstanding the language of Christ when He said, "My kingdom is not of this world," they suppose that His kingdom is divorced

from the things of the world, and takes no cognisance of the common affairs of life. They look upon the Church as a mere fold in the wilderness, in which souls are shut in from the secular world, to meditate upon Divine things, and to prepare for eternity. It has nothing to do with human economy—with the administration of law and government, with the arts and sciences and industries of life; it concerns men only in their spiritual and eternal interests. To all who would thus seek to remove the Church from its legitimate position, it will prove a burdensome stone. We have an awful example of the effects produced by the separation of the Church from the world, in the days when the Church became one vast monastic institution, and to be a Christian was to retire into the desert as a hermit or a recluse. The world, deprived of the hallowing influences of association with the Church, became more reckless and wicked; and the Church, shut up from its proper work in the world, became morbid and superstitious, a prey to the numerous vices which idleness and loneliness invariably produce. Evils of an analogous kind would be certain to result from the divorce of the Church from the world at the present day. The world would become more godless and the Church more sanctimonious. Materialism would increase; bitter secularism would prevail. The affairs of the world would be administered in a purely worldly spirit; and the religious sanctions which at present guard our most sacred and cherished

institutions would disappear at the demands of business or pleasure, or be sacrificed to appease the clamours of a triumphant secularism.

It follows, then, that the Church is not to be made a mere political institution on the one hand, or, on the other, a mere spiritual institution. It is associated with temporal things, for man is both a body and a soul; it is associated with spiritual things, for man belongs to eternity as well as to time. Free to exercise its own spiritual functions within its own spiritual province, it is at the same time to sanctify all the interests and relations of human life; to bring everything with which man deals into subjection to the higher laws of eternity, so that there may be holiness to the Lord upon the very bells of the horses, and the pots of household use may be consecrated equally with the vessels of the sanctuary to the service of heaven. It is not an archaic institution, existing among us on account of the prestige of antiquity; but the ever-living agency, by whose means and ordinances the ever-living Saviour works to-day as He worked eighteen hundred years ago. It is worthy to receive all the tributes of the world. Kings are to be its nursing fathers, and queens its nursing mothers, and the nation and kingdom that will not serve it shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. But all that it asks is to be left free to employ its own spiritual force to make all men willing and loving subjects of the King of Kings, and to hasten

the time when all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of God and of His Christ. All who help the Church in this righteous cause shall themselves have the prosperity of those who labour for the prosperity of Zion. All who abuse it for selfish or ambitious purposes will be fatally injured in their own souls. Like the little stone in the monarch's dream, the Church used aright will smite down the most formidable idols of the world, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. But perverted, it will crush by its weight every frail human structure of which it is made the copestone.

Jesus Christ is the testing-stone of men, the tried stone which all the ages have not been able to displace or disintegrate, and from which "all the hammers of criticism have never chipped a single fragment." Every human being is brought to try his strength with this Stone. If, in the exercise of a living faith, you set yourselves earnestly to the task, you will get power from on high to lift this Stone and set it in its proper place as the corner-stone of your faith. You will find it a light burden; the duties of the Christian religion will be to you easy and pleasant; your burden will be your support, your weakness your strength. And as living stones built upon the Living Stone, you will partake of the life, durability, and blessedness of your foundation. But if, as self-willed builders, you reject this Stone as unfit to be the corner-stone of your religious structure, then when it is brought forth with rejoic-

ings to crown the structure of faith in the end, it will fall upon you and crush you. This Stone will be a stumbling-block and a rock of offence to you so long as you refuse to make the right use of it. What Simeon said of Jesus is solemnly true, "This child is set for the rise and fall of many in Israel." The "Stone of Israel" is set for your fall if you reject it; you will stumble against it and be sorely hurt; your heart will be dissatisfied, your conscience will accuse you, your life will be vain and lost. It is set for your rise if you make it the foundation of your hopes—the stepping-stone to higher things. He will attract you like the loadstone if your character is kindred—if there is any good thing towards God in your heart; He will repel you like that same loadstone if you have nothing in you like Him. He will be burdensome to you if you will have nothing to do with Him, for you cannot do without Him. He will bear all the burdens of your life and give you rest if you lean the weight of your souls upon Him.

XIII

DEBORAH

"But Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak: and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth."—GENESIS xxxv. 8.

HUMAN history is a pathway across the churchyard of the ages. The feet of the successive generations hurrying over it obliterate the inscriptions upon the tombstones. Only a few escape erasure, owing to their bolder outlines, or to the instinctive reverence that preserves them. Here and there we are arrested by a short record, that tells of some beautiful character or some noble deed which the world cannot forget. Among the multitudes that passed into oblivion during the lifetime of Jacob, only a few names survive to our day; and of these names that of Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah, is not the least conspicuous. The word Deborah means a bee; and the memory of her who bore this significant name in the far-off ages, is like the little bee found the other day in the coffin of the mighty Pharaoh, that had been attracted by the flowers before the lid was fastened down, and was thus shut in with the mummied dead, and shared in the same

immortality. Wordsworth speaks of the hum of the bee as being—

> A slender sound, yet hoary Time
> Doth to the soul exalt it with the chime
> Of all his years.

And the faint hum which Deborah made in the world, has awakened an echo that has reached across the silence of the intervening centuries, and touches a deep chord in our hearts to-day.

It was because the old Egyptian bee was shut up in the same coffin with Pharaoh, that its little body survived to our time; and it was because Deborah was connected with the patriarchal family, that her memory endured amid the oblivion that has overtaken nearly every other contemporary. Pieces of amber are sometimes found, in which the body of an old-world bee has been embalmed for a million years—the sole relic of all the animal life of the remote period, when the primeval pine forests exuded the gum that crystallised into its coffin. And so the precious amber of the Bible has embalmed the name of Deborah, because she was the nurse of Rebekah, and lived in the household of Isaac and Jacob, and shared with them in the covenant blessing. It is very touching that we should thus have a record, not only of the illustrious heads of the sacred family, but also of one of its lowly dependants. In admiring the stateliness of the oak, we are apt to lose sight of the little white sorrel-flower that grows at

its root, and that gives its august protector a touch of beauty and grace. And so, while Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob absorb our attention, we do not usually think of the humble retainers in their households, Eliezer and Deborah, whose names we know because they gave them the loving and faithful service of their lives. It may be instructive, therefore, to stoop down, and examine more minutely the brief record of one who linked together the patriarchal households, and formed a bond of connection between them and the ancestral home. Her life was not great according to the standard of the world. She was one of the obscure characters of Scripture, and the work she did was in an unnoticed sphere. But the humblest work is necessary, and in its own way important; and often those who do it are in their own degree as noble and praiseworthy, as those who by their brilliant tasks have moulded the ages.

The first time that Deborah is noticed is in connection with the departure of Rebekah to the distant home of her husband. She acted as nurse in the household of Laban. She had been Rebekah's foster-mother, and had brought her up from her birth. The attachment between a foster-mother and the child she has reared, in whom there is not a drop of her blood, is often stronger than that which she cherishes towards her own children. It used to be so in the Highlands of Scotland; and numerous stories are told of an Irish foster-mother sacrificing the interests of her own children for the

sake of her foster-child. During the Indian mutiny, the Hindoo ayah in charge of an English child, often went through unheard-of privations and dangers, in order to preserve the life of her little foreign charge from the ferocity of her own countrymen. In Eastern families such a nurse was highly valued and honoured. Long after the necessity for her services was over, she remained as a permanent member of the household, and was the beloved friend and counsellor of all. So was it with Deborah. Rebekah had grown to womanhood; but although the special duties which she originally performed were no longer required, her nurse lived with her foster-child, and watched with deep interest her expanding powers of body and mind, and, no doubt, was her sympathetic companion and confidante in all her joys and troubles. And when the crisis came in which Rebekah had to abandon her father's house and her own people, and cast in her lot with strangers, even though of her own blood, in a distant land, Deborah refused to be separated from her. Like Ruth, who accompanied Naomi from Moab to Bethlehem, Deborah followed Rebekah from Mesopotamia to Canaan. "Where thou goest I will go: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

We can imagine the comfort her nurse would be to the young inexperienced bride, over the long weary journey through the Eastern desert; and the happiness of having with her, in the strange circumstances of her new abode, one who was so closely

associated with her old home—who could not only minister to her bodily wants as no one else could but also talk sympathetically of the days that were no more, and of the familiar scenes left far behind. When the cavalcade, under the guidance of the faithful Eliezer, arrived at Hebron, and Rebekah was received into mother Sarah's tent as the wife of Isaac, Deborah settled down with her mistress into the calm routine of everyday duty. The life in Isaac's home was very much what she had been accustomed to in the home of Laban. It was a pastoral life—restful, secluded, and continuously religious. An atmosphere of antique quiet hung around it, for the aged Abraham still lived with his son—as his father, the aged Bethuel, had lived with Laban. And when the birth of Esau and Jacob introduced a new interest into the tranquil household, Deborah would, in the case of the children, revive the solicitude she used to feel for the mother. Rebekah's partiality for Jacob, who was undervalued by his father, would make Deborah espouse his cause in any contest with his brother; and in the foolish favouritism which prevailed in the tent, and divided the household, introducing the seeds of future sorrow and alienation, she would, no doubt, have a large share. There were traits of character in Jacob, who dwelt quietly in the tent, which harmonised more with her own womanly qualities than the rough, impetuous activities of the bold hunter, Esau; and therefore

she uniformly took his side along with her mistress. That Jacob was the favourite with Deborah, as he had been with his own mother, we infer from the fact that when the household of Isaac was broken up, and the brothers were separated from each other, and at last Rebekah died, it was Jacob, and not Esau, who took the old nurse home, and cherished her declining years with tender affection. In Jacob's house she was, doubtless, the friend and confidante of the grandchildren as she had been of the grandmother and the father; for her heart was like a honeycomb—capable of adding new cells of affection to those that were already full, and renewing its youth by the exercise of that love that never grows old.

And when the end came, at a good old age, the grateful patriarch and his children laid her to rest under the shadow of an oak near their home. She was not buried in the cave of Machpelah with her mistress, for that sepulchre was reserved for the members of the patriarchal family as the charter of their right to the inheritance of the whole land. But she found a grave near the hallowed sanctuary of Bethel, where God had given such a wonderful revelation of Himself to Jacob, and where the ladder had been set up connecting earth with heaven. That she was much beloved and deeply mourned is evident from the fact that the oak under which she slept the last deep sleep received the name of the Oak of Weeping, from the loud and long lamenta-

tion that was made over her death, and also from the peculiar way in which the sacred narrative announces the sad event. It contrasts it with the gladness connected with the consecration of a new altar to God at Bethel, and says, "*But* Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died": as if it had said, "What availeth this joy when there is a great sorrow in the home?" This was the dark cloud that blotted out the sunshine; and the peculiar expression shows how serious was the interruption caused to the happiness of the household by the death of this aged servant. It made a great difference, and left a great blank in the daily life of the home. It is said after her death that God appeared again unto Jacob and blessed him—or, as the original word should be translated, *comforted* him, as one who had sustained a sore bereavement.

The bee was an Egyptian symbol of regal power, and among the Greeks it was applied to poets, and especially to the priestesses of the oracle of Delphi; while we are reminded of the beautiful fable of the sacred bees of Parnassus depositing their honey upon the lips of Plato, the wisest man of the ancient world. Mahomet says in the Koran: "The Lord spake by inspiration unto the bee." Between Deborah's name and her character there must have been a correspondence. She must have been the wise woman of the patriarchal household as well as the nurse, whom all consulted in difficulty and trouble, and whose advice was invaluable. This, I think, is

distinctly shown not only by the way in which she was buried, but also by the holy and historical character of the spot. If she had been a mere nurse, a mere ordinary woman, however faithful and devoted, she would not have been laid to rest under a kind of tree which had become sacred, because of its connection with the patriarchal wanderings in the Land of Promise, and which had always an altar to God erected under its shade. The Allon-bachuth that extended its protecting branches over her grave, became in after years one of the most famous trees in Palestine, a conspicuous landmark to travellers over the central highlands. It grew into a sanctuary, where the people came from far and near to worship. Under the wrongly translated name of palm tree, it was the seat of assemblies gathered in this locality in the time of the Judges; and a greater and better known Deborah—a queen bee of Israel—lived there, and administered justice in those distracted times. It was at this oak that the spirit of prophecy came to Saul when he was anointed by Samuel to be the first king of Israel; and it was under this oak that the prophet from Judah sat, when he was divinely commissioned to declare the awful fate which should come upon the altar of Bethel, erected by Jeroboam for his calf-worship. This celebrity attached to her last resting-place, showed that Deborah was no common woman, and kept her memory green for many generations as a mother in Israel.

In the Scripture notice of Deborah we have the record of a human life, of which nothing more could be said than that she lived and died as the nurse of Rebekah. Though associated with the patriarchs, her life contained none of those important outstanding events by which their history was signalised. It was a monotonous expanse of level ordinary experience. It was a life of servitude, prosaic and unromantic; and yet we see what love it drew forth, with what honour it was crowned, how deeply it was mourned when it was ended, and how long its memory remained to affect succeeding generations. The case of Deborah teaches us how the common drudgery of life may be made honourable, and worthy of being commemorated in God's Holy Word among the heroic achievements of patriarchs, kings, and prophets. Most people have nothing more appointed to them than was appointed to Deborah — a lowly position, a common round of duties, service to others. They have to impart whatever romance they can to humble experiences, and to find occasions of heroism in the endurance of common toils and the resistance to ordinary temptations. But the greatness of any work depends not so much upon its outward magnitude in the eyes of men, as upon the loftiness of the moral qualities that are infused into it. Heavenly principles and the powers of the world to come can be brought to bear upon and to redeem the most commonplace tasks. They can be performed with unselfish

loyalty to the Divine Master. There is a wonderful picture in the Louvre in Paris, painted by Murillo, in which is represented the interior of a kitchen; but the servants doing the work there are not mortals arrayed in sordid garments, but beautiful white-robed angels. Gazing upon this rude scene, you feel how it is transfigured by the nature of those who move in it: how very noble even the humblest details of kitchen work may become when they are performed by heavenly beings. And so, if men and women realise that they are heavenly servants —immortal beings, doing their work not as unto men, but as unto the Lord,—how will this feeling refine and ennoble it until there is more of heaven than of earth in it! And besides the good that such lowly service may do to the individual, its results will live in the total sum of human influence. There may be no possibility of following out its history—of separating it from the service of others. It may mingle with the vast whole of the world's achievements, and be indistinguishable to human eyes; but He who makes each seed sown in the spring to yield its own separate ear of corn in the great mass of ears that wave in the general harvest-field, will identify each one's share in the total outcome, and accurately proportion individual reward to individual service.

We are apt to think that the conditions of domestic service in the ancient world were the same as those in our own country at the present day.

But those who did the work of the household of the patriarchs were not free, but bond. Liberty and voluntariness, which enter so essentially into our ideas of the relation between master and servant, had no existence in the ancient world. Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah, was a slave, the possession of her mistress; and it showed not only what a soul of goodness there was in the evil of such a lot, but also what a strength of noble character Deborah must have possessed to rise above her circumstances, to have been so much appreciated when living, and so sincerely mourned when dead; to have had her history associated with that of the patriarchs, and her name written in the Word of God. We know that the condition of many of the saints of the New Testament was that of slaves, like Onesimus, the absolute property of their owners; and the Epistles reveal to us the striking fact that the will of God in very many cases was done nobly, and the life of faith and heavenly purity and love lived in the hardest circumstances of servitude, and amid the foulest corruptions of pagan homes. Not merely in their leisure moments, but even in the performance of their servile duties, multitudes of Christian slaves manifested their devotion to Him who had purchased them from a more dreadful slavery, and translated them into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. As the bond-servants of Jesus Christ, they regarded their servile state, not as an iron fate by which they were bound, but as the condition in

which they could best serve God of their own free choice—the slaves of men, but the freedmen of Heaven.

The example of Deborah and of the Christian servants in the time of the Apostles is instructive to those who occupy similar positions in our households. The law of Christ has effected a wonderful transformation in all the relations and dependencies of life. It has entered homes, and changed slaves into free and willing servants. It places on the basis of a common brotherhood in Christ all human relations and duties. It enables the extremes of society to sit down together before the memorials of a Saviour's love, to eat the same spiritual meat and to drink the same spiritual drink, and in full sympathy of heart and soul pray that they all may be one. It assures us that in Christ Jesus there is neither bond nor free. More faithfully, then, than Deborah or the Christian slaves of the Apostles' time, should the free servants of our time, who profess to love the Lord Jesus and to serve Him, occupy their sphere of usefulness for the glory of God and the good of man.

Why, it may be asked, do the relations between master and servant exist? Are they simply accidents; or are they entirely economical, mere human expedients of domestic or social convenience? That, I believe, is the common view. But it is not the right or Scripture view. God has appointed these relations, and He maintains them as

a part of His great plan for disciplining our souls out of sin and selfishness, and preparing us for a state in which such relations shall be unknown and unnecessary. The servants in the households of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were introduced by God into this sphere, not merely that they might serve their masters and mistresses in the common work of everyday life, but that they might share in the education and training of the covenant family: that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob might be their own God. And hence, such servants, sharing in the benefits of the same spiritual education and discipline which their masters and mistresses received, were called not *hands*—as we, in these modern times, are disposed to call those whom we employ—but *souls*. We are told expressly of Abraham by God: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." And so it should be always. The work of the servant is not a mere means for getting money or comfort, but is designed to be a moral training for the higher nature; and the relation between master and servant should be a mutual discipline of kindness and consideration. It should be regulated, not by that Mammon which makes slaves of us all, but by that love which makes us free indeed. In these days we are confused with constant struggles and outcries regarding the rights of capital and the rights of labour, the rights of

masters and the rights of servants; but the Gospel of Christ speaks not of the rights, but of the duties of men, and holds forth for universal imitation the example of Him who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.

Deborah was loved and revered as a friend in the family of Isaac and Jacob; and how many Deborahs have grown old in the service of the one household, and have hived up there large stores of goodness, so that they have long ceased to be called servants, and are known as cherished friends! How often do we notice in the newspapers the death of some aged servant who had been thirty, and fifty, and even sixty years in the same home; having done faithful work until no longer able, ministered to by loving hands to whom she used to minister—the comforter in sorrow, the adviser in difficulty, and the patient confidante and helper of all, and who when she died was followed to the grave by the deep love and gratitude of two or three generations! In the Protestant cemetery at Florence I was greatly struck by two modest tombstones placed side by side: the one was the grave of an English general who served in India, and coming to Florence, died there; the other was the grave of his man-servant, who had grown gray in his service, and had shortly predeceased him. On the tombstone of the servant was carved the touching words—"Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a

brother beloved," which Paul wrote in his beautiful letter to Philemon, enjoining him to receive back his runaway slave Onesimus. It was not death that made these two, master and servant, equal, but love stronger than death, the faithful attachment and devoted service of long years given by the one, and the deep gratitude and respect and affection given by the other in return; and, above all, the common love of both to one Master—the Lord Jesus Christ. It does one good in a commercial age like this, when money is made to answer all things, and the relations of social life are regulated by the principles of the market-place, to come across such a record of disinterested affection and Christian devotion.

This should be a common experience; and all the relations of master and servant should be based upon the same Christian law. The tie of master and servant concerns only this life, and has reference only to the lower nature of man. But the tie of faith and love in Christ Jesus which binds them together, if they are Christian believers, has respect to the spirit, and falls under the powers of the world to come; and assuredly, if the right place and the full power are given to the higher relationship, the lower must necessarily be purified of all its sinful and selfish elements, and made all that it ought to be. If a mistress looks upon her servant as in Christ Jesus a sister beloved, she will act towards her in all things in a loving considerate spirit; and if the servant looks upon her mistress

as a sister beloved in Christ, she will regard her interests as if they were her own. Love will constrain her to do things which money could never pay, which no amount of wages could ever buy. And such a servant will not only be loved and esteemed during life, as truly a member of the family, and sincerely and lastingly mourned and missed, as was Deborah, when she dies, but will also earn the distinction mentioned in these wonderful words, "Blessed are those servants, whom the lord, when he cometh, shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them."

XIV

PILATE'S WIFE

"When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him."—ST. MATT. xxvii. 19.

THE interference of Pilate's wife in the judgment scene of Christ is one of the most picturesque incidents in evangelical history. St. Matthew was led by the spirit of inspiration to record it, for it serves a most important purpose in connection with God's overruling Providence. It brings out in the most forcible manner the fact that Christ was condemned to death, in spite of every warning and hindrance that could be placed in the way. We hear it often said that there was a necessity laid upon those who took part in the great tragedy which they could not escape. They were delivered over by a Divine decree to do these things. The death of Christ was the fulfilment of an eternal purpose. He was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God; and all the details of His death were intimated previously by sacred prophecy. There was, therefore, no true responsibility resting upon those who compassed that death.

But, in reply, it may be said that, though the sacrifice of Christ was thus foreseen and foreordained, there was no fatal necessity compelling those who brought about that death to act as they did. Their individual freedom was not limited in the least degree. Each person acted out spontaneously what was in him. Pilate at any moment could have been true to his own convictions of Christ's innocence, and could have delivered Him. If there had been any Divine compulsion in the case, why should Pilate's wife have been allowed to warn her husband, since the effect of her warning might have proved disastrous to the whole scheme of grace? If Pilate had listened to his wife's remonstrance, and released Christ, then God's plan of redemption, so far as we can see, would have been frustrated. We cannot, indeed, understand the mystery of God's sovereignty and man's freedom. We cannot, in the present case, reconcile the freedom with which those who were concerned in the great tragedy of Christ's death acted, with the prearrangements of Divine Providence and the prophetic intimations of Scripture. There are metaphysical difficulties implied which we cannot solve. We are assured, however, that those who condemned our Lord to death had not merely the misfortune to play a part, the guilt of which was consequently foreign to them; but they were free agents, acting throughout in character, and therefore responsible for what they did. Christ's death was not only a necessity in the Divine order: it was an actual result of human

sin. Sin was left free to work out what was in it: to blossom and fruit, and thus show its true nature in the culminating crime of the world.

Our curiosity is greatly aroused regarding Pilate's wife. We are told nothing about her in Scripture, except what is mentioned in this one incident. Tradition identifies her as Claudia Procula; and it has been conjectured that, bearing such a name, she must have belonged to the Claudian family—one of the most famous families in Roman history, whose founder, Appius Claudius, was the maker of the great Appian Way, and which gave no less than six emperors to Rome. The emperor who was sitting on the throne at the time of our Lord was Tiberius Claudius. Being thus of high station, it is probable that it was through her influence that her husband, Pontius Pilate, was made procurator of Judea; for Pilate's own birth must have been comparatively humble, seeing that the name Pilate is derived from the cap which was worn as a distinguishing badge by manumitted slaves, and the epithet marks him out as a freedman, or as descended from one. She accompanied her husband to Palestine; and it is a striking illustration of the exactitude of the Scripture narrative, that it was only during the reign of Tiberius Claudius, that the wife of a Roman was allowed to accompany her husband to the province which he ruled. In early times a law was expressly passed to prevent a magistrate taking his wife with him to the sphere of his jurisdiction, lest she should

interfere with his administration, or unduly influence his public career. And this law was rigorously carried out; but at the time of our Lord the prohibition had fallen into neglect, and though shortly afterwards a proposal had been made to put it in force, it was not successful. Perhaps the wife of Pilate had received a special permission to accompany her husband, on account of her connection with the reigning family; and in any case her presence in Jerusalem at the time of our Lord's judgment indicates that the relationship between herself and her husband must have been one of deep and true affection. Pilate, if he had been an indifferent husband, might have left his wife behind at Rome, in conformity with the law of the empire. And his wife, if she had been less loving and devoted, might have remained at Cæsarea, which was the fixed official residence of the Roman governor, and the headquarters of the Roman army in Palestine; and not have accompanied him to Jerusalem, to which he had to go during the annual feast of the Passover, to preserve order among the great crowds of pilgrims which at that time filled the sacred city.

The voice of tradition further indicates that Pilate's wife had become a proselyte to the Jewish religion. This may have been the case; for many of the noblest Romans, men and women, had been attracted by the purity and elevation of the Jewish faith. We read in the New Testament of several centurions being converts; and Josephus tells us

that, later on, Poppæa, the wife of the Emperor Nero, had become a proselyte to Judaism, and had in consequence greatly favoured the Jews in Rome. Coming from a land teeming with idolatry, and with the social and individual corruptions to which idolatry invariably leads, Pilate's wife must have been struck with the contrast of the Jewish worship of the true God, and with the purity of morals which it fostered. She would doubtless read the sacred Scriptures, which were accessible to her in the Greek translation, as Greek was the polite language of society everywhere at the time; and in them she would become acquainted with the marvellous history of the Jews, and with their ardent anticipations of a coming Messiah. Dissatisfied with her own worn-out creed, and unable to do without a religion, it is easy to believe that she found relief to the longings of her soul in the purest faith that was then known in the world. That she knew about Jesus previous to her dream there can be little doubt. For we may reasonably conclude that her assurance of His being "a just man," as she called Him, must have been derived, not from the circumstances of the dream itself, but from previous knowledge of His character and conduct. Pilate, in the course of his administration, must have often heard of the extraordinary man who was the wonder and mystery of His day, who uttered such wise words, and whose astonishing miracles were proclaimed over all the land. He must have made himself familiar with all the doings

of One who was followed wherever He went by multitudes, who would gladly place Him at the head of an insurrectionary movement, and who might thus be exceedingly dangerous to the Roman authority. He knew how the chief priests and rulers regarded Him: how it was from envy that they delivered Him into his hands. And he must have often spoken to his wife of the strange Galilean, and wondered with her what manner of man he really was. All this would deeply exercise her mind, and form a subject of profound interest to her.

It is not difficult, therefore, to understand how, in the supreme crisis of Christ's life, she should have a vivid dream regarding Him. We know that dreams are usually shaped by the circumstances of our waking hours. The phantasmagoria of our nightly visions are conditioned by the things that happened to us, and the surroundings of our life during the day. "A dream," says Solomon wisely, "cometh through the multitude of business." Jacob dreamed that the stones around the place where he lay formed themselves into a ladder, leading up to heaven; and Peter, fasting and hungry on the top of the house of Simon the tanner, whose trade was dressing the skins of all kinds of beasts, clean and unclean, dreamed of a vessel let down from heaven full of fowls and beasts and creeping things, which he was commanded to kill and eat. And so we can easily understand how Pilate's wife, having formed the opinion re-

garding Jesus, from all that she had seen and heard, that He was a just man, and being, consequently, deeply concerned when she knew that her husband had been asked to try him, should have projected her anxiety into her sleeping hours, and woven out of it a painful nightmare. Some have said that her dream was a magical device of the devil to hinder Christ's atoning death; and others that it was an inspiration of God. But it is not necessary to have recourse to supernatural causes to account for it; it was simply the natural and necessary result of her waking anxieties. In all likelihood the dream occurred, not at night, but in the early morning of the very day on which Christ was brought before Pilate; for she says, "I have suffered many things *this day* in a dream because of him." And we shall not be far wrong, I think, in attributing the dream to the noise of the crowd that, before the break of day, was carrying Jesus as a prisoner to the magnificent palace where she was sleeping, and where the Hall of Judgment was.

We are familiar with the strange effect which a sudden noise in the room where a person is sleeping produces upon the dream that the sleeper may be dreaming at the time; how it calls up new visions and combinations, often of a distressing and alarming nature. At the time that Napoleon Buonaparte threatened to invade our country, a gentleman in Edinburgh dreamed that the landing had taken place, that the volunteers were mustering,

that the signal-gun from the castle was fired—and then he awoke. His wife awoke at the same instant, having had a similar dream; and it was discovered that the cause of both dreams was the falling of a pair of tongs in the room—acting upon the thoughts about invasion which were then dominant in their minds. And, similarly, we may well believe that the tumult of the multitude outside may have worked itself into the dreams of Pilate's wife, and led her thoughts of anxiety about Christ into a troubled and painful channel. A few moments may have sufficed to excite dreams full of long-continued and elaborate scenes of painful suffering; for it is by no means uncommon for persons during the short period of transition from sleep to wakefulness, to pass through many experiences. There are many dreams on record which appeared long to the dreamers, and embraced a multitude of scenes and circumstances, and yet could not have occupied in reality many seconds. The shouts of the crowd that awoke Pilate's wife from her sleep may, therefore, have originated, in that brief moment of passing from unconsciousness to consciousness, the many things which she suffered because of Jesus in her dream.

We know not what was the precise nature of that dream. But it would be sufficient to cause her much suffering, if it only reflected in the sensitive mirror of her mind, what was actually happening in front of her palace at the moment; if she saw, as a distressing *fata morgana* of the soul, the

insults and brutalities that were inflicted upon the meek and holy Prisoner by the crowd athirst for His blood. If she saw in her dream the vision of the wonderful Galilean, with His God-like brow bound with cruel thorns, His pale visage more marred than any man, and His eyes filled with a sadness which pierced deeper than reproach, and yet gleaming with a love that triumphed over all its wrongs; and if a mysterious voice came to her at the same time and said that these wounds were caused by her husband's hands, that he was even now hastening to the judgment-seat to judge and condemn his God and hers,—we can imagine how terrible would be her sufferings, and how she would awake with a start, and with a dread presentiment of evil wrapping her soul in gloom.

It was a morning dream; and morning dreams, as poets say, are true. She had an irresistible conviction that it was a Divine warning specially given to her; and therefore without a moment's delay she sent a messenger direct to the judgment-hall. Her anxiety may have been mainly regarding her husband, lest he should perpetrate an awful act of guilt, and so bring himself into danger. But we cannot suppose, from what must have been the nature of her dream, and from what must have been her knowledge of the Prisoner, that she was not at the same time anxious to protect Jesus Himself. The step which she took was a most uncommon one. To the Romans we are indebted

for that unrivalled system of jurisprudence which has formed the model of every nation since. Everything connected with their judicial procedure was grave, orderly, and subdued to the majesty of law. A dignified and impartial administration of justice, with which nothing was allowed to interfere, was one of the noblest contributions of the Romans to the civilisation of the world. We can understand, therefore, how exceptionally daring was the conduct of Pilate's wife in venturing to interfere with her husband in the exercise of his magisterial functions. In ordinary circumstances such interference, even by the nearest relation of the presiding judge, would be considered as contempt of court, and punished severely. But though she knew all that her act implied, the emergency was too great to allow her to stand on ceremony. As a faithful wife she would risk everything to save her husband from his danger.

We cannot imagine any omen more fitted to impress the superstitious mind of Pilate than such a dream, coming to him at such a time, and from such a source. It would vividly remind him of the famous dream of Calpurnia, the wife of Julius Cæsar, who saw the vision of her husband lying murdered in her arms, and who therefore strove to prevent him from going to the fatal meeting of the Senate, at which his death was decreed by Brutus. Its warning knell would ring in strange harmony with the alarm that was already

pealing in his own spirit. The confession of the innocence of Jesus which came from his wife, tallied with the impression which Jesus had produced upon himself. The noble and dignified bearing of the Sufferer had awakened his superstitious fears that He might be one of the demi-gods of his own mythology—especially as He was accused of calling Himself the Son of God. And gladly would he have yielded to these fears; gladly would he have followed his own instinct of justice, and resisted the clamour of the fanatical crowd, who, he knew, were thirsting for innocent blood. But his weak and vacillating nature had allowed the opportunity of asserting his authority to pass; and the decision was now taken out of his hands. He was compelled reluctantly to yield what he had not sufficient strength of will to refuse. His wife's solemn warning proved in vain. It only aggravated his guilt. Everything was brought home to him that could give him certainty regarding the sinlessness of Jesus. But even his own susceptibility to the higher feelings of our nature, and all the offered means for the discovery of the truth that were placed in his power, only paved the way to his ruin, since they could not bring him to a just decision. And though he afterwards ostentatiously washed his hands in the open court in the presence of the people, to absolve himself from the guilt of the fatal sentence, the act was a mere farce, as weak as it was unavailing. Nevermore could he

free himself from the responsibility of the greatest crime that has been committed since the world began.

But though thus ineffectual as far as her husband was concerned, the dream of Pilate's wife may have been of great use to herself. It delivered her own soul from guilt; and it is not improbable that by its silent agency—for dreams may bring conceptions of unseen and eternal things which our waking hours could never form—she was brought to know that Jesus was truly the Son of God. She was, indeed, humanly speaking, a fit subject for Christian conversion, if we consider all that her interference implied. She had felt pity for Christ, suffered on account of Him, and her dreams about Him were the result of her waking thoughts. She spoke out boldly for Him when all others were silent, when His own countrymen were fierce in their denunciations, when His own disciples forsook Him, and one of the three who were nearest and dearest denied Him with oaths and blasphemies. She dared, in the face of the dread tribunal that had excommunicated Him as an impostor and blasphemer, to proclaim Him publicly a just man, righteous as well as innocent, and she bade her husband beware how he meddled with Him. A woman who could have so acted and spoken was not indeed far from the kingdom of heaven. Of her Jesus Himself might have said, what He actually said of a countryman of hers, that He had not found such faith, no, not in Israel.

We cannot believe that such a woman relapsed into the moral death of paganism, or even remained in the living stagnation of Judaism. Rather do we sympathise with the Greek Church, which has always considered her to be a Christian—a Christian saint. Perhaps in the case of one whose nature seems to have been so generous, the sorrowful fate of Jesus may have dispelled all her previous hesitation to become His follower, and precipitated a decision which, in other circumstances, might have been of slower growth. Who knows, though the Scriptures are silent on the subject, but she may have been with the women who stood afar off beholding the crucifixion of Jesus, with hearts beating in tenderest sympathy for Him ; for such a woman would not be satisfied till she had seen the end of a tragedy in which she was so profoundly interested! Who knows, but she may have been among the noble women who came nearer, and, according to the custom among the wealthy ladies of Jerusalem to provide a soothing opiate at their own expense for the benefit of those who were crucified, compassionately offered to Him the wine mingled with myrrh to stupefy His senses, but which He would not receive! And may we not suppose that the unexampled portents of the Crucifixion, and the extraordinary events of the Resurrection, and of the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, with which all the land was ringing, completed in her soul the conviction produced by her dream, that Jesus was all that He claimed to

be—not only a just man, but her Lord and her God?

And what an admirable Christian she would make! Her picture is photographed in miniature in a single verse of Scripture; but what captivating traits of natural character does it reveal! Devotion to her husband, tenderness of sympathy for the suffering, fearlessness in standing up for the truth, and boldness in confessing her faith. The grace of God consecrating and perfecting the beautiful moral portraiture would have achieved one of its greatest triumphs, and enlisted in the service of Christianity one of its noblest supporters. She suffered many things because of Christ. The sword that pierced Jesus pierced through her heart, as it pierced through the heart of her who gave Him birth, and as it pierces through the heart of every one who takes up the cross and follows Him. And was this fellowship of His sufferings fruitless? Is it not easy to believe that she was a companion in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ; that suffering with Him, she reigned with Him? And thus, while her poor weak pagan husband, disobedient to the light that was in him, fell into political disaster, was recalled from the Judean governorship which he had disgraced by the perversion of justice, and finally died a suicide's death in some obscure place of foreign banishment, his noble wife lived and died a fellow-citizen of the saints and of the household of faith.

We may regard Claudia Procula, Pilate's wife,

as the pioneer of the remarkable band of Roman ladies who did such signal service to the cause of religion in the earliest years of the Christian Church. Descendants of the oldest patrician families which founded Rome, which had governed her during all her period of splendour and liberty, and which had enabled her to conquer the world, these ladies became in the end the humblest and most devoted servants in the kingdom of Christ. It is most interesting to think that the last daughters of the Scipios and the Fabii—among the greatest names in Roman history—should become followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, and thus crown the long history of their illustrious race with its greatest glory. In those dim dawning years, when the might and the intelligence of the world were against Christianity, not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, were called; but there *were* a few, and these few were the noblest of all. If they had much to leave for Christ, they glorified Him much. And we must never forget that it is to one who bore the same patrician name as that of Pilate's wife—Claudia—the wife of Pudens, mentioned by Paul in his Epistle to Timothy, who is supposed to have been a British princess, the *protégée* of Pomponia, the Christian wife of Aulus Plautius, the Roman commander of Britain—that we can trace the introduction of Christianity into our country, ages before the famous landing of St. Augustine and his monks on the shores of Kent.

The lessons which such an incident as that connected with Pilate's wife teaches us are manifold. They must have impressed themselves upon us in the course of our meditations. Though much that I have brought forward concerning this remarkable personage is only conjectural—the conjectures, however, being based upon a strong foundation of probability—yet much is plainly revealed and obvious. She gave her testimony regarding Jesus openly and fearlessly, when there was no one to uphold her, and all the world was against her. If there was nothing else true regarding her but this, that one thing has a moral worth which is simply inestimable. Persons of such a strain, be they men or women, are by native right the leaders of God's great army, and their example inspires others to do and dare the right. Especially when one of what is called the weaker sex shows such heroism, it makes some loftiness of spirit easier for the generality of mankind. There is nothing more striking in connection with the last scenes in the life of our Lord than the devotion of women. It stands out in marked contrast to the cowardice and cruelty of men. If the sin of the world came through the temptation of woman, women nobly redeemed their character in connection with the redemption of the Cross. How the Saviour honoured women throughout His life! And how they strove to repay Him by their love and service! They ministered to Him of their substance; they confessed Him when there

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was none else to stand by Him ; they wept and bewailed Him as pitiless men led Him through the streets to His execution ; they were last at His cross and first at His sepulchre.

And ever since, the highest devotion of women has been evoked by that religion which has done so much for them. In these days of scientific scepticism and materialism, we sometimes hear it said with a sneer that only women believe in the Christian creed. But this, so far from being a proof of its unreality, is the highest evidence of its power. Would that women everywhere knew and exercised the vast influence which their Christian faith gives them! In the days of chivalry, the armour of the knight was buckled on by his lady's hand ; and this, as Ruskin finely says, was "no mere caprice of romantic fashion, but the type of an eternal truth—that the soul's armour is never well set to the heart unless a woman's hand has braced it ; and it is only when she braces it loosely that the honour of manhood falls." In the *Idylls of the King*, it was Percivale's sister who first saw the Holy Grail, and then fired her brother with the desire to find it. It was she, too, who bound the sword-belt on young Galahad, and made him believe in her belief, and bade him go forth to seek the sacred treasure. Christian wives, seek to win your husbands to Christ, when they behold your chaste conversation, coupled with fear! Daughters and sisters, make your fathers and brothers strong and faithful

to confess Christ by the witness-bearing of your own devoted lives! And let each of us, men and women alike, do what we can to save, by the grace of God, those whom we love and can influence from the guilt of crucifying the Lord of Glory afresh, and from that sin that hath never forgiveness, either in this world, or in that which is to come.

XV

AIJELETH SHAHAR

"To the chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahar."—PSALM xxii.

THE beautiful and poetical title of the Twenty-second Psalm—"The Hind of the Morning"—has been variously explained; but the meaning which is most likely to be the true one is that which connects it with the morning sacrifice. Every day at sunrise there was a solemn service held in the temple. The priests whose turn it was to perform this ceremony went up on the roof of the temple while it was yet dark, and gazing eastwards, watched for the moment when the rays of the sun, rising above the mountains of Moab, first struck the city of Hebron to the south-east. This was their primitive clock or sundial. As soon as they saw these herald rays, they cried, "It is day at Hebron," and they sounded the silver trumpets to awaken the city of Jerusalem from its slumbers. Immediately afterwards a lamb was slain and burnt upon the altar. After this sacrifice was offered, the morning prayer and the ten commandments were read in the hearing of the people, who gathered together for the

purpose. Then a Psalm was chanted, and incense was offered on the golden altar in the inner shrine by the officiating priest, who went in alone, but gave a token of his presence by the sound of the bells on the skirts of his robe. And the benediction of this priest, who came out from the solitude of the holy place and pronounced it standing on the steps of the temple porch, concluded the ceremony. This impressive service was held every morning, and we have reason to believe that the Twenty-second Psalm was the identical Psalm that was chanted on the occasion.

It was called Aijeleth Shahar, or Hind of the Morning, from the peculiar phenomenon which the priests always saw, when watching on the roof of the temple for the dawn of day, in order to begin the morning sacrifice. People in the East are more familiar with the sunrise than we are. Owing to the heat of the day, they have to get up very early to do their work, to take advantage of the coolness and freshness which is characteristic of the early morning. In this way they have been led to observe particularly the common appearances of nature at that time, and to give names to them in their ordinary language. The priests who patiently watched for the dawn on the temple roof, saw at first a dim pearly glimmer in the east, and one star shining brightly in the sky. Slowly and gradually, as they waited and looked, a space of silvery light appeared, fringing the edge of the night. It became brighter

and warmer, and at last over the sharp level ridge of the Moab Mountains two long beams of light shot up from the horizon, on which a small section of the sun's golden disk might be seen. This peculiar appearance, announcing the coming of the day, seemed to the fervid Eastern imagination like the head of a gazelle or deer, crowned with its magnificent antlers. The deer frequents high places ; and they had doubtless often seen a deer or gazelle reclining on the sky-line, with its head and horns, illumined by the sun, distinctly defined against the cloudless sky. It was a spectacle of this kind that caused the Eastern people to call the rising sun the gazelle or the hind of the morning. And this first appearance of the Aijeleth Shahar was welcomed by a smoking sacrifice and a burst of song ; just as the peasant in some secluded valley among the Alps to this day greets the rising of the sun, as it flushes the highest peaks of snow with its rosy hues, with the joyous notes of his Alpine horn, and so awakens the inhabitants from sleep to begin the labours of a new day.

If you study attentively the whole Psalm, you will find how appropriate is the title that has been given to it, and how suitable it was that it should have been chanted at the break of day during the morning sacrifice. It begins in darkness, you observe. It commences with the lowest note of despair, and concludes with the highest note of joy, like a lark that rises at dawn from the cold dewy ground and

sings aloft at the gate of heaven. The first verse indicates the midnight darkness of a soul that cries to God and gets no response, and feels in a silence and solitude so great that God scarcely seems to be there. And forsaken by God, it is abandoned by man, persecuted, sorely afflicted, and buffeted. And so the night of spiritual gloom settles down upon the soul, and the darkness deepens, until that darkest hour before the dawn, when there is no ray of hope in heaven or earth, and it seems the blackness of darkness for ever. But at length the long weary night of weeping comes to an end. The day breaks, and the dayspring from on high visits the soul. The sense of loneliness vanishes, and the Sun of Righteousness rises with healing in His wings, dispersing all the shadows of doubt and fear, and bringing new hope and fresh vigour. The weeping that endured for a night ends in the joy that cometh in the morning. For notice how different is the ending of the Psalm from the beginning. He who wailed his terrible sense of Divine bereavement in the midnight darkness, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" sings in the bright morning light, "Ye that fear the Lord, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard." And this wonderful transition takes place because all the time

the Psalmist has not abandoned his trust in God. Even when he feels forsaken, he still clings to Him and calls Him "My God"; and says, "But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them." In the midnight gloom, in the absence of all sensible evidence of God's presence, God was in reality not far off, but very near—a very present help in time of need; and the everlasting arms were underneath him even when he was least conscious of their sustaining power.

No actual change has taken place in the outer world to cause this wonderful revulsion of feeling. The Psalmist's circumstances are precisely the same. His foes still compass him about. Saul's persecution still continues as hot as ever. All is unchanged, as the landscape over which the darkness of night broods, is the same landscape over which the bright light of the morning sun shines. But what a difference there is in himself—a difference as great as between day and night—the result of that marvellous rising upon the soul of the dawnlight of heavenly love! And as the strain of prayer passes into thanksgiving, his joy is not a selfish, solitary joy. He wishes others to sympathise with him in his freedom and enlargement of spirit. He says, "My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him. The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him." And he con-

cludes his story of personal wrongs and sufferings, not as Ecclesiastes, the book of his son Solomon, concludes its record of all human achievements and experiences, with a pessimistic outburst of "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity"; but on the contrary, with an outburst of triumphant faith in God, looking forward with confidence to the future, and singing a glorious pæan of the hope of the world. "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. . . . They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this." The hind of the morning, refreshed and comforted, bounds over the same hill on which it lay down in the darkness of night, wounded and wearied, to die.

And it is most interesting to notice that this Psalm of sorrowful beginning and joyful ending is one of the indubitable Messianic Psalms. On the highest summit of the Harz Mountains in Germany a strange phenomenon may occasionally be seen, called the Spectre of the Brocken. I have also seen it several times on the top of our highest Scottish mountains. It is the shadow of your own body cast on a cloud which happens to be on a level with the mountain summit on which you are standing. In this shadow the proportions of your body are greatly exaggerated, and a small man becomes a huge giant. And so against the dark cloud of David's sorrow was

projected the far greater sorrow of the coming Messiah. The Psalmist in his own suffering saw the transcendent sufferings of the Redeemer of the world. So too with the Israelites in general; their national sufferings formed the cloud for the display of this mighty Spectre of the future. It was always during a time of universal distress that the hope of the coming Messiah was strongest, and the idea of a suffering Redeemer, one who should conquer through sorrow and suffering, bulked most largely before the popular imagination. That wonderful picture which the Evangelical Prophet draws, during a season of the greatest calamity, in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, seems not like a prophecy, but an actual history of Christ's sufferings and death. And in all these forecasts of the Messiah, we find, what is so striking a feature in the Twenty-second Psalm, sorrow turned into joy, the wail of distress changed into the song of triumph, and a glorious hope of the universal success of Christ's cause. "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days . . . he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied. . . . Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong."

And just as the sorrows of David looked forward to those of the Messiah, so your sorrows, if they are endured in fellowship with Christ, look back to His sorrows. They form the dark cloud not *on* which

you see a spectre of the past, but *within* which you see the living Redeemer transfigured, afflicted in all your afflictions, while the Angel of His presence saves you. Faith connects every sorrow with Christ's sorrow, and thus makes it Messianic. He Himself was forsaken in His last hour by God, that no human being who trusts in Him might ever have that desolate feeling again. And as you spend the long weary hours in the darkness of your Gethsemane, and often cry by reason of the soreness of your trouble, "Watchman, what of the night?" in the company of Him who keeps the lonely vigil of sorrow with you, and who shares the fellowship of your sufferings, the night will soon wear away. Already the golden horns of the Hind of the Morning are shooting up in the Eastern sky. Cease your murmurings and groanings then, faint heart! Tune your lips to sing the Lord's song! And let your prayer come before Him as incense, and the lifting up of your hands as the morning sacrifice.

My text and sermon lend themselves easily to a short reference to the irreparable loss which our country has sustained by the death of Lord Tennyson. It is right that I should mention the name of our immortal Laureate in this place and in this connection, because of the great debt of gratitude which the religious, as well as the literary world owes to him, as one of the most inspiring teachers of our age. More than almost any one else, he has helped to mould the thinking and the living of our

day; and it is a cause of unspeakable thankfulness that on the whole psalm of life which he sang and which he lived, might be inscribed the title of the Psalm of my text. He is indeed to us "the chief musician" of our day "upon Aijeleth Shahar"—the Hind of the Morning. While we have in his poetry the still sad music of humanity, that poetry is nevertheless bright with the sunshine of a higher world. The night of sorrow always breaks in it into the joy of the morning. He proves in his treatment of all the vexing problems of life that "experience worketh hope"; that, however dark and disconsolate things may look, there can be nothing but ultimate success for every good cause. This characteristic of hopefulness, true more or less of all his poems, is remarkably true of that most exquisite poem, in which his genius flowered and fruited, *In Memoriam*, composed, like David's lament for Jonathan, in memory of the beloved friend of his youth. That poem enshrines sorrow, as it were, in a crystal sphere, and views it in all its aspects. We might have expected in it only passionate complainings against an iron fate, for snatching from him a companion of his soul, who was to him what Jonathan was to David; and indeed it is full of the morbid musings and the deep questionings of our restless age regarding the secrets of life and death. But though steeped in tears, the sorrow is always tempered with a Divine patience and trust. There is a wonderful restfulness about it. The impression

which it produces is one of calm serenity and sweet acquiescence in the Divine will, together with an eager looking forward to the happy reunion beyond the veil. And in the end, it comes out of the dark valley into the daylight of the larger hope of the Gospel, and it sees the flash of heavenly wings above the human dust. How jubilant as a morning song is its voice when it cries—

> Ring out the darkness of the land,
> Ring in the Christ that is to be!

and how triumphant is the climax to which it leads us up!—

> That God, which ever lives and loves,
> One God, one law, one element,
> And one far-off divine event,
> To which the whole creation moves.

Tennyson did not write hymns or professedly religious poems, though he not unfrequently chose sacred subjects for his muse. But his poetry is as near to the Bible as the title of the Twenty-second Psalm is to the Psalm itself. All his poems have the beautiful unearthly light cast upon them wherein sorrow finds its deepest meaning, and love its highest consecration. In all his speculations about the mysteries of life and duty, the light by which he groped in the darkness was the light of the Cross; and he solves these mysteries not by philosophic reasoning, but by trust in God. The flame which his poetry kindles in our hearts is an

altar-fire for the worship of high heaven. By his deep sympathy with their best impulses and desires, he has led multitudes to purposes of reverence and pure living; and to many a blind doubting soul he has given strength and light to climb those "great altar steps that slope through darkness up to God." In an age of satiety and over-refined civilisation, when men have asked wearily, "Is life worth living?" deep earnestness is the pervading element, the unifying spirit of all his strains. He was all alive in a living world. He spoke from the heart to the heart. Above all others, he combined the love and the knowledge of Nature, with the unceasing study of Nature's laws and the causes of things; and proved that poetry, so far from being antagonistic to science, derives from it that which appeals at the same time to the deepest feelings and to the keenest intellects of mankind. He revealed the charms of Nature in a way that transferred the intensity of his own feelings to them, and that invests them with a delicacy of suggestion and a subtlety of music inexpressibly delightful. So much was he the high priest of Nature, that she seems now to miss her interpreter; and all the bright things of the world seem sadder, when he who revealed their meaning to us has gone away from among them. We can understand, when we think of his death, what the old country-people meant, when they performed the touching superstitious ceremony of telling the bees in the garden of the death of a

member of the family, and draping the beehives with a shred of black. The death of the golden-mouthed poet, upon whose eloquent lips the sweetest honey of song, gathered from all the fields of Nature and of human life, had been distilled, has been told, as it were, to the bees, and the still small voices of Nature are mute with sorrow, or sing in low sad strains his requiem, and over all "the happy autumn fields" are the signs of mourning and decay.

No poet has left a richer legacy to his country than Tennyson; and it is wonderful how much his poetry is incorporated with our higher thinking, has passed into school reading, and forms part of our household words. Cloistered from the busy crowd and from the strife of tongues, he lived, like a consecrated monk, entirely for his art. His whole life was one pure noble poem; and now he has made even the darkness of death beautiful to us by his dying. And though lost to mortal sight, the vanished hand still retains its tender touch, and the voice that is still, through all the generations will have power to bless. In the departure of one who thus trusted in God, and wrought a noble life-work for humanity, and earned the love of all his fellowmen, we instinctively feel that the soul, when most conscious of completion, cannot be nearest to extinction; that death is not the end, but the beginning of new and higher service. We think of dawnlight rather than of "sunset and even-

ing star," and of the fuller and richer morning song that is sung where all the shadows have for ever passed away, and the perpetual fulfilment of all sacrifice is the Lamb as it had been slain, in the midst of the throne.

XVI

THE WINGS OF THE MORNING

"If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."—PSALM cxxxix. 9, 10.

THIS is a most beautiful and suggestive image. It refers to those silvery-white or opaline clouds which appear a little before and after sunrise during summer on the hills of Palestine, and, like a veil on the face of a bride, invest them with a witching charm. They are brought by the west wind from the bosom of the Mediterranean. From end to end the sky is one vast field of stainless blue; and this dazzling line of cloud-surf, with which the aerial ocean breaks upon the mountain shore, contrasts strikingly with its profound monotony everywhere else. The exquisite softness and radiance of these fleecy morning clouds; their ever-changing forms, alternately concealing and revealing the rocky peaks flushed with the red glow of sunrise; their brief duration—fugitive, according to Hosea, as Israel's transient seasons of repentance—dissipated by the heat, and exhaled back into the burning blue as the sun

rises above the horizon and gains in power—all these beautiful characteristics arrest the attention and excite the imagination in an unusual degree It would be easy for a fervid Eastern fancy to find many points of comparison between those billowy clouds, edging the morning sky, and a gigantic sea-bird that had left its home on the waters, and for a brief space rested to smooth its ruffled plumage on the inland heights. And when afterwards it stretched its pinions and took its flight beyond the western horizon, leaving the blue sky without a cloud, and the blue sea without a shadow, the fancy that had given it shape would wish to borrow its wings and flee away to explore the fascinating mystery of the regions to which it fled.

1. This comparison of the morning clouds to the wings of a huge bird, brings before us one of the most remarkable characteristics of Hebrew poetry. That poetry exhibits the varied life of Nature in vivid allegory. Nature to the Hebrew mind was a living miracle, not a dead machine—a creature full of eyes and wings, whose movements were not the results of mere senseless forces, but of personal intelligences ; and whose appearances were not mere combinations of material forms, but looks of living faces, gazing wistfully up into the human face. The Hebrew knew Nature from within—saw the vision of the hills, and felt the soul of lonely places. The four winds were angels between earth and sky, binding one element with another. Deep called

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unto deep. The dark mountains watched all night for the dawn, and rejoiced in the morning rays that lit up their gloom. The trees talked to each other, and their speech was mutually sympathetic. Nature was pervaded with the life of the living God. The varied loveliness of creation appealed not only to the intellect, but also to the spirit. In the things which do appear were seen the things which were invisible. The soul of the universe manifested itself in its outer forms. Thus appropriately did the Hebrew poet speak of the "wings of the morning," endowing with life the inanimate hues and forms of the wondrous awakening that came at each dawn to the landscapes of the East. That pageant of brightness and beauty, which illumined heaven and earth, was the outer fringe of God's garment of glory. Those "wings of the morning" spoke of a living Power. The very language itself implied a continuance of life. It is impossible to conceive that these living wings could transport the living soul of man beyond the boundary of life into the awful outer abyss of nothingness. He who made these wings obviously sustained them as far as they could carry; and therefore, wherever they passed, they of necessity were the sign of His presence and the operation of His hands. How could a Hebrew's thought get beyond God, when he believed that the order of the universe was God's personal conduct of it?

The ancients had no conception of the unity of

the universe, and therefore they could not have a conception of an Almighty Power and of an Omnipresent Providence. The world of Nature was for them broken up into a multitude of seemingly independent forces and systems acting capriciously; and therefore gods many ruled over limited regions with a limited sway. The god of the hills had no jurisdiction upon the plains; and the god of the plains lost his authority on the hills. They believed in isotherms of Divine power, as we believe in isotherms of temperature. Even the Jews had to be gradually educated to an understanding of the true nature of God. They began with low and materialistic ideas of Him. They were ever ready to put their conceptions into the mould of the surrounding idolatries. We see in the religious training of the Patriarchs how they rose from the limited and unworthy imaginations of the heathen to the pure, exalted views which they entertained at the close of their lives. But we are placed in altogether different circumstances. We have learned the unity of the world, the correlation of its forces, and the continuity of its laws and forms. And, as a mere metaphysical question, we are shut up to the conclusion that if there be any spiritual power at all, only one God can preside over and regulate the destinies of the universe. We are, therefore, no longer in danger of worshipping gods many and lords many; of believing that each separate domain of Nature must have its own divinity; and that

there may be unknown outer parts of the world where no spiritual power holds sway.

But while the crude and elementary conceptions of early ages have been dissipated, we are confronted with a much more serious difficulty. We know that if there be a God, He must be omnipresent. But the difficulty is to realise the existence of this one living and true God, which the logic of our day demands as a pure abstraction. Almost every part of the material system is now explored. And this condition seems even more unfavourable to a belief in God than when mystery abounded on every side. When a cloud covers the sky, it is easy to believe that God is behind the cloud ; but when the cloud is removed, it is more difficult to believe that He is within the clear blue sky, whose fathomless depths are naked and open to our gaze The cloud has been taken away for us—the veil of Creation has been withdrawn. We have penetrated into its inmost recesses. The remotest parts of it are brought continually into closer contact. Distance has ceased to be a hindrance or an enchantment. The light of physical science has dispelled the darkness that surrounded many of the forms and forces of our world. We have by our microscopes investigated the hidden sources of things ; and by our telescopes and spectroscopes we have searched the heavens and examined the materials of the remotest stars. And having thus exhausted so far the mystery of the universe, our very familiarity with its forms

and forces, the ease with which we can trace and explain the links that unite all parts of Nature, seem to exclude God, and to make Him unnecessary. We seem like the Roman General who, after the conquest of Jerusalem, penetrated into the inmost shrine of the temple, lifted the veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the outer sanctuary, and found, instead of the God he expected,—nothing.

Many of us have lost the belief of our childhood —that Nature is living; that there is a spirit in the woods, and a voice in the winds, a presence among the hills, and a laughter in the waves. Many of us have lost the faith of riper years that the world is full of God; that day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night teacheth wisdom concerning Him. There is a spiritual solitude around us which oppresses us. We feel forlorn under the stars of heaven, and when alone face to face with the grander spectacles of the world. Is there not abundant need, then, to return to the old Jewish ideas which we had forgotten, or imagined we had outgrown? Men, in the name of religion, speak of the eastern position in regard to their churches; but what we require most is the orientation of our souls. We who dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, need even from thence to take the wings of the morning and go back to the youth of the world, to the East of the years. Dante tells us that it is "in the East the world most lives," and the spirit of the East must sanctify the knowledge of the West.

We must take the vivid faith that arose in the morning lands to bring back to us the religion of Nature, to enable us to see God walking with us in the garden in the cool of the day, speaking to us out of every wayside bush, and setting up His ladder between heaven and earth in every lonely spot. These late autumnal years should breathe the vernal breath of life's primeval days.

There never was a time, indeed, when the lesson of the Hebrew Psalmist was more needed than now. We need, while we study the amazing facts of science with our intellect, with our heart to find in them illustrations of God's character. The enlarging of the physical universe should be the exalting of our spiritual realm of thought; and the great discoveries of gravitation, the correlation of forces, and the law of continuity pervading and embracing the whole physical universe, should give force and reality to our spiritual principles. And when we penetrate to the icy solitudes around the North Pole, or explore the dense forests of the Tropics, or wander into the dark heart of Africa, these grand pictures of strange scenes should become to us all the grander when we connect them with God's presence, and regard them as new manifestations of His power. The triumphs of our modern civilisation need to be crowned with a higher and purer knowledge of God, to which they ought to lead up, else they will only make life a greater weariness and vanity, without purpose or hope.

But it may be profitable to look a little deeper

into the beautiful poetry of the text. The metaphor suggests distance. In the East long journeys are always taken in the morning, when the air is coolest and fatigue is least. In our own country, if a man has a long way to go, he rises very early in the morning, in order to have time to reach his destination ere nightfall. And taking into account such usages as these, the Psalmist may have implied that the wings of the morning would transport him to the greatest distance possible. There was a long day, as it were, before him ; and, having begun so early, he could wing his flight, with such swift means of conveyance, to the remotest verge of earth. Now, distance has an illusive power, not only over the senses, but even over the mind. As things recede from us, they become more vague and dim. It is most difficult to realise with any vividness what is remote. A great catastrophe that takes place in a foreign country does not impress us nearly so much as a small accident beside our door. We can hear almost with complacency of terrible fires and floods and famines in South America or in China, which in this country would throw every heart into the greatest agitation of sympathy. They do not press upon us with the same keen reality, and are not judged by the same measure. And so, if we take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, on the same principle we may find it difficult to realise the presence of God there, just because of the illusiveness of distance. God becomes more indefinite

the farther we remove Him. The mystery of remote places attaches itself to a God afar off. He is surrounded by circumstances that are so unlike our own that they refract the imagination and cloud and distort its pictures.

What can be more consoling, then, in those farewells that come so often to our households in these modern days, than the words of the Psalmist, which Enoch Arden adapted in his parting words to his wife :

> Cast all your cares on God ; that anchor holds.
> Is He not yonder in those uttermost
> Parts of the morning ? if I flee to these
> Can I go from Him ? and the sea is His,
> The sea is His : He made it.

What a blessing it is to realise that those who have gone from us to the ends of the earth, to the farthest shores of the Western World, or "by the long wash of Australasian seas"—forms once the most familiar in our daily life, now hid in the haze of distance—are still led by the hand and sustained by the right hand of the same God who leads and sustains us. Science tells us that the attraction of gravitation binds the remotest worlds of space, as it binds our own ; and He who by this wonderful force holds the stars in His right hand, watches over our friends in other hemispheres, beneath other stars. The same sun shines upon them that shines upon us, and the same God spreads the curtains of His providence around their dwellings who spreads them around ours. He says, "Am I a God at hand, and

not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? Do not I fill heaven and earth?" For this cause we can bow our knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, and meet in spirit at a throne of grace those from whom mountains divide us, and a world of seas. There is, in reality, no separation from those who are one in God; and there is no indefiniteness in the thought of the life of those who are partakers with us of like precious faith. That faith annihilates distance, and gathers the dispersed of Israel into one, and is the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea.

2. But, further, the image of the wings of the morning suggests newness. Each morning seems to new-create the world. Each day the earth issues from the womb of night new-born, with the dew of childhood upon it. The stage seems cleared of all the old experiences for a fresh start amid new experiences. And so the idea of the Psalmist may have been that the wings of the morning would transport him into a morning world, where all old things would pass away, and all things become new. In this old world, where so many generations have grown up in the knowledge of God, where so many institutions have become hoary in maintaining His worship, where so many holy spots associated with His presence exist, where so many helps to faith abound on every side, and the very flowers have

often sacred names and traditions, and the very stones, trodden by blessed feet, cry out Hosannas, it seems easy to feel that God's hand leads us, and His right hand holds us. But far away in new regions, where Nature for untold ages has reigned supreme, undisturbed by man, and man is but slowly conquering Nature and making a home for himself in the wild waste, and where there are none of the old familiar things with which we are accustomed to associate the idea of God, it seems more difficult to realise that God dwells in the bush there, and exercises the same watchful providence as in our long-cultivated fields and busy haunts. We feel like the patriarch, when, fleeing from his home, he alighted amid alien scenes, that the Lord is not in this place; we feel like the "Ancient Mariner" that the new land is so lonely that God Himself scarce seemeth there to be. But the heavens open over us there to disclose His glory, and the earth beneath us becomes a house of God, a gate of heaven. The new phenomena are but new tokens of His presence, new proofs of His wisdom and power. As, under the fresh dews and the bright renovating light of morning, it is the old earth that reappears each day, so the new scenes to which the wings of the morning transport us are full of the old memories and associations of God. The earth there, as at home, is a window that looks into heaven. We have that within us which can make the most novel circumstances suggest the old religious ideas. And in the most

remote desert we hear the voice saying, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

3. But there is another idea still connected with these morning clouds. They come from the uttermost parts of the sea, and on their wings the Psalmist would wish to soar back with them. These parts represented to the dwellers in Palestine the region of the setting sun. The West was regarded by almost all the nations of antiquity as the realm of the dead. Thither the souls of men, when they escaped from their bodies, took their flight. In the islands of the Western Ocean was the land of spirits. It was a dim land of shadows, over which a twilight that did not rise nor set perpetually brooded. And in these materialistic days of ours, this twilight of the gods seems to many minds to have deepened into the eternal night. The world of the dead, according to the ancient belief, was alienated from God, whose empire was exclusively confined to the living world. The shadow of death was the shadow of evil, in whose depths the knowledge and the presence of God were lost, and a dark hostile power reigned instead. Hezekiah expressed the belief regarding death as an alien realm in the strongest manner, in his wail of lamentation over his approaching death: "I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave . . . I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living." And even the Psalmist, in his gloomiest moments, was affected with

the same despairing impression: "Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" But by making the means of conveyance to this alien land the wings of the morning, the Psalmist implied a most striking contrast. If he took the wings of the morning into that evening land, would not its darkness be dispelled? Would it not shine out clear of all mystery, like the earth when the dawn has lit up its face? Would not God be seen to be even there, leading him by His hand, and holding him by His right hand? Would he not have cause to say, "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

All ecclesiastical tradition places the dying Saviour on the cross facing the west. He who is the Morning Star passed within the veil that hides the uttermost parts of the West; entered into the darkness that covered them. And by passing into it with the wings of the morning—with the morning life and freshness and beauty—He brought the whole old realm of night and death by one act out of darkness into daylight. He carried His life through death, and so demonstrated death to be a mere shadow; like the sun passing through the night-time, which is but a long shadow upon his face. He converted it

from an outside waste into a part of our home. He annexed it to the kingdom of heaven. By the rending of the veil of His flesh, the whole universe was brought into sight; the two worlds, the seen and unseen, were made one. There is no part of God's universe from which His light and life are necessarily excluded. The darkness of the spirit-land is now as much open to the eye of God and subject to His control as the habitations of men on earth. There is no realm of pallid, shivering ghosts, but a transfigured world lit up with the sunlight of the unveiled face of God. Death makes its darkness for ever beautiful with the blessed presence of the altogether lovely One. The wings of the morning are now folded in the west. They appear in the clouds of sunset dyed with its golden hues. Through the gates of the West, in the uttermost parts of the sea, the day vanishes in light which is inaccessible and full of glory. To die believing in Christ, is indeed to take the wings of the morning—the faith that belongs to those who are converted and become as little children—and so enter into the kingdom of heaven. This faith alone can lift our spirits above the dark clouds of sin and sorrow, of doubt and fear, and enable us to leave the shadow of death behind, and enter into a free, bright universe for ever.

Those who go to dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea should take the wings of the morning with them there. Many leave the religion of their childhood behind them when they leave their native land.

There is nothing to remind them of the hallowed worship to which the Sabbath bell used to summon them; and amid the new associations, the old memories of heaven sink beneath the horizon of the heart. But, in the absence of Sabbath blessings and Gospel ordinances, the very stones beneath their feet cry "Hosanna," and the palm-branches proclaim the triumph of the Redeemer. The strange soil which they cultivate is full of Divine mysteries. The seed which they sow speaks to them of the parable of the Divine Word; and God is the energy of the sunbeams and the rains which yield to them their harvests. The universal beauty of heaven and earth is the token of His presence. God's wondrous works declare that "His name is near." And what is wanted is, that the stranger from the far land should bring to the new nature around him, not the dim worn-out eye of worldly philosophy, which saw not God amid the teeming proofs of His works in the old home, and sees in the new country only the bush, and not the heavenly fire in it; but the fresh, simple eye of the child that is open to wonder, and has the insight of faith and the instinct of the invisible. Every one who leaves the fatherland for a foreign shore should do so in the character of a missionary; not necessarily preaching his Christianity by his lips, but certainly by his life. And if this were the case more frequently—if every sailor and trader and colonist were acting out practically the comparison of the kingdom of heaven in the parable to a

merchantman,—then the commerce of the world would be one of the most effectual means for hastening the time when the whole world should be filled with the knowledge of God.

The thought of God's omnipresence produced no stifling feeling in the Psalmist's mind. He had no sense of want of room, of a restriction of freedom, from the consciousness that God was in every place. He felt that the presence of God overshadowing him was the true light and enlargement of his soul; that God's law was his perfect liberty. For us there is greater gladness opened up than for the Psalmist, in the thought of God's omnipresence, by the fact that in Emmanuel He has come still nearer to us, and made Himself visible in our own human nature and life. In the person of Jesus, the Divine Spirit besets us before and behind, so that we are in the very midst of the kingdom of heaven. He limited Himself for awhile that He might work out our salvation. He came as a Jew, and lived exclusively in the Holy Land, and confined His presence and labours to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But He ascended up on high above all limitations, with His human experiences and the results of His finished work, that He might fill all things. And now God in Christ Jesus is very close to those who open their souls to receive Him—close without, and still closer within.

But in order that there may be intimate communion between the human spirit and the Divine

Spirit, there must be mutual harmony. The sin that alienates us must be removed by the blood that cleanseth from all sin; and the Spirit of God must create us anew in Christ Jesus unto all good works. With such godliness—*Godlikeness*—we shall have an instinctive recognition by our own spirit of the kindred Spirit of God everywhere; we shall have a calm satisfaction in the presence of God wherever we go. And in the constant presence of such light and love, we shall seek to avoid even the least appearance of evil. The contrast of the sin of the world will come out in darker hues against this bright background of righteousness. We shall do everything in our power, with God's help, to remove the evil in ourselves and in the world. And in proportion as the conviction of God's presence everywhere becomes established in our souls, so in proportion will the desire grow to make this world His kingdom and ourselves His image. Our sanctified spirits will ever possess the wings of the morning. We shall keep the faith of our childhood through our old age; we shall take it with us wherever we go; and even in the uttermost parts of the sea—the land of sunset and darkness, where the day is turned to night—God's hand will lead us, and His right hand will hold us.

XVII

THE LAND OF FAR DISTANCES

"Thine eyes shall behold the land that is very far off."
ISAIAH xxxiii. 17.

HOW often have these words been used to comfort the dying believer, in the sense of a promise that he shall soon behold the glories of heaven! The land in question is supposed to be reached only after death, although glimpses of it may be obtained here and now from some Delectable Mountain of faith, some Pisgah height of joyful Christian experience. But heaven can in no sense be said to be a land that is very far off, except, indeed, to the wicked, of whom it may be asserted that they behold Christ, and the place in which He dwells, like Balaam, "not nigh"—or as the rich man in hell saw Abraham, "afar off." Heaven must be distant alike in space and in spirit to those who have no likeness to it in their own nature. But heaven is near to all who are heavenly-minded. It lies about us in our infancy; the kingdom of heaven is within us. In the worship of that God who fills both worlds, the wall of separation is thrown down;

heaven and earth are one; and the Church below and the Church above stand on common ground. We are here and now come to the City of the living God. Our conversation is in heaven. This is always true as regards our feeling, if we have that faith in lively exercise which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. And as regards our actual entering into heaven, such is the shortness and uncertainty of life, that but a breath dims the vision of it—but a single step separates us from it.

What, then, does the prophet mean? The words should be translated, "Thine eyes shall behold the land of farnesses, or the land of far distances." The circumstances that gave rise to the saying were those connected with the memorable siege of Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah. The tents of the Assyrians were blackening all the heights around the sacred city, and the inhabitants were reduced to the greatest straits. Hezekiah during this siege covered himself with sackcloth and ashes, and humbled himself before God. He was also disfigured with the boils of a severe and dangerous illness, and prayed earnestly for relief. In these trying circumstances, a cheering promise of deliverance came by the mouth of the prophet, conveyed in imagery derived from the circumstances of the siege. The fierce invader, Sennacherib, would be routed, the besieging troops would be withdrawn, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem would see their king in his beauty—restored to

health, and clothed again with the gorgeous robes of state which he had laid aside during the period of his humiliation. They would also behold the land of farnesses. Hitherto, for a long period, they had been shut up in the besieged city; they were confined within the walls and closed gates of Jerusalem; their horizon was bounded by the narrow streets and houses around them; they could see nothing beyond —no green tree, or field, or garden. But when the siege would be ended, they would be able to go out at will into the country, and feast their eyes upon its fair landscapes and far-extending prospects. They would be brought out into a free and large place, and their horizon would stretch into illimitable distances.

And, so interpreted, what a beautiful image it is! We speak of a prisoner being "set at large"; but we little realise what the phrase means to him—the new and thrilling sense of largeness around him: air and space and light, and God's great world, with its lofty sky overhead; nothing confining his movements or intercepting his view but the horizon, which, in the far distance, comes down upon the earth with walls of blue air, opening up into farther distances as he moves on. His eye, hitherto accustomed to the semi-opaque gloom of his narrow prison-cell, beholds with rapture the wide, open country. In such new circumstances his soul expands within him, and he feels himself a part of the infinite light and liberty around.

And what are we all in this world but prisoners of fate? We are in a besieged city. The walls of life hem us in. The freedom which the most favourably situated of us imagine we enjoy is only the length of our chain. We are limited by our natures, by our faculties, by our weaknesses, by our circumstances. Human nature, made in the image of God, and destined for eternity, is in itself a large thing, and it needs a large world to live in. But we are each shut up in a small world; and, small as it is at the best, we make it still smaller by our sins and our follies. We enclose ourselves in straits, and confine ourselves in prisons of our own making. We dwarf our natures and belittle our powers by the insect tasks to which we devote ourselves. We paralyse our faculty of enjoyment by undue indulgence. We lay waste our powers by overexertion; we narrow our faculties by concentrating them upon the one aim and end of becoming successful in the world. We are short-sighted, looking only at the things that are seen and temporal.

Thus imprisoned, living within a straitened horizon, Satan comes and promises that our eyes shall behold the land of far distances if we will only obey him. He took up our Lord to the top of an exceeding high mountain, and showed to Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and promised that they should be His if He would fall down and worship him. He offered to transport our first parents beyond the limits of their narrow garden,

and give them a godlike freedom to enjoy, if they would eat of the forbidden fruit. And as he tempted the first and the second Adam, so he tempts every man. He knows that the eye of man was made for far distances—that the soul of man longs instinctively for wider and more varied experiences than can be found in the little round of daily life; and therefore he cunningly adapts his temptations to this godlike instinct. He offers a freer life and a larger world. But the disenchantment soon comes. The eyes are opened, and they see that the promise of the vision is a mere mirage of the desert, which has changed for the moment the thirsty sand and the arid air into the appearance of living waters and refreshing verdure. Instead of far distances and boundless prospects, the transgressor finds himself in straits which become narrower as he advances, until at last, like the prison-house of the mediæval story—constructed with fiendish ingenuity to contract its walls every day—they close in upon him and crush him, and his prison becomes his grave. Sin inevitably cripples the energy and restricts the freedom of the human powers. To that longing for freedom and enlargement which is the chief element of fascination in every sin, the tempter has nothing to give but the experience of a drearier imprisonment.

Science, with its magic eye-salve, seeks to purge our vision, so that we may see the distant and invisible. But, like Argus, it is itself purblind with its hundred eyes. It only partially cures our blind-

ness, so that we see men as trees walking. It confines our gaze to the things of time and sense. In itself, and apart from higher influences, it makes us near-sighted, not only in regard to the spiritual world, but even in regard to this great creation. It takes the Divine meaning out of Nature, and robs its wonders of their chiefest beauty and their brightest promise. It minimises the significance and worth of human life by the awful certainty of its laws, the vastness of its spaces and periods, and the infinite variety of its forms. The scientific man is prone to become a fatalist, and to give up all the higher aims of the soul.

But if the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets us free from the law of sin and death, we are brought out from the confining bars of the prison-house of the soul into a large open world; we have the vision and the faculty Divine, and become far-sighted indeed. We feel like one who has been transferred from the dark, dreary depths of a cavern to the summit of a lofty mountain, from whence the eye takes in at a glance a boundless horizon. We have a sense of recovered freedom which quickens and enlarges the soul. Old familiar things acquire a new aspect and meaning. The vastness and glory of the universe fill us with joy, because it all belongs to our Father, and is ours by virtue of our Divine sonship. We behold the things that are unseen and eternal. Both worlds, the earthly and the heavenly, come within our horizon, and are visible in one view

to the eye of faith. All things are ours—life and death, things present and things to come.

The land of far distances which the prophet Isaiah spoke of was not in some foreign country, to which a long and toilsome pilgrimage had to be made. It was simply the region round about Jerusalem, the fair open country, fading away in the far-off aerial perspective; the land of clear lights and distant views, as contrasted with the narrow streets and the strait boundaries of the besieged city. And all that was necessary to enable the inhabitants to see it was that the siege should be ended, and that they should be delivered and allowed to go out of the city to behold it. And so the spiritual land of far distances which it symbolises, is not a land removed from us into the remote depths of heaven, like a fixed star. It is round about us; our being is in it now; our souls are the inhabitants of it here. It is our Fatherland. This world itself is the land of far distances. Its things that are unseen and eternal are only eclipsed by the shadow of ourselves. All that is necessary is that our eyes should be opened, and that we should be delivered from the bondage of sin, and made heavenly-minded in order to see it. Those who are converted, and become as little children, enter into it and abide in it; and to faith it is always given to realise how this earth is embosomed in heaven: how there is but one heaven which comprehends all our life—past, present, and future—and all the scenes

and circumstances of the universe, as there is but one ocean that holds all the continents and islands of earth within its wide embrace.

It was the advice of Sydney Smith to take short views of life. That, he said, was the secret of his own happiness. And truly there are many circumstances in which that is the best advice. To take life as it comes, to take a single step at a time, to confine our attention to the present experience, and not to anticipate the future: these are maxims of worldly wisdom whose soundness has been often tested. And our Lord Himself has told us to take no thought for the morrow; that sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. The bitterest element of life is the fear of evil, the anticipation of coming trouble; and life would undoubtedly be much happier could we get rid of this anxious "looking before," for scarcely any evil is so terrible as the dread of it. The calamity that is limited to its own occasion is more easily managed than if we fill all futurity with the sadness of the present moment. God has mercifully ordained that we have to deal not with the whole of life, but with small portions of it, as they are measured out to us one by one. And thus, by the limiting of our view and the narrowing of our range of action, our attention is concentrated upon the objects that are close at hand, and upon the duties and responsibilities connected with them.

But, on the other hand, there are times when to take short views of life is to behold only the present

evil, without any mitigation; to be shut up with it, without hope of escape—like a man shut up in a pit with a wild beast. If we had no outlook beyond the evil, we should be left to realise and brood over all its terrors, and we should struggle in vain against an irresistible doom. How blessed in such circumstances to have the power to bring that which is absolute and eternal to bear upon the fleeting and changing present! Life is infinitely greater than all its troubles, which are but ripples on its bosom, clouds in its sky. There is a land in whose boundless perspective all affliction is light, and but for a moment. Isaiah's eye saw this land of far distances. He ascended the mount of God; and there, while the immediate world around him seemed to be waxing darker and more evil, he realised a picture of the future of the world more glowing than anything to be found in human literature. From "the summit of the last ridge of Jewish history," he gazed far off into the distant ages, unbroken by any intervening barrier; and, like him who sat silent upon a peak in Darien, and gazed, the first European, upon the wide Pacific, the inspired prophet saw in the remotest horizon a grand vision of the redemption of the human race, to be accomplished, not by Jews alone, but also by Gentiles—by One who should be at once the desire of all nations and the fulfilment of the Jewish prophecies. Without the outlook into that land of far distances, Isaiah could not have endured the miseries of his day. The distant

future cheered the present, and hope banished despair.

And as Isaiah found comfort, so must we. It is only by beholding with the eye of faith the land of far distances that we can overcome the terrors of the present. What were this world without the prospects of the next? Who could endure the trials and failures of this life without the bright promises of the future life? Our life is too great to have its plan completed and its mystery explained within the limits of this world. We must survey the horizon of eternity, if we are to behold the full unfolding of the economy under which we are placed, and but a very small part of which falls under our inspection here. We must behold the land of far distances if we are to see the end of the Lord, that He is very pitiful; the termination of all the paths by which He is leading us, and recognise that they are mercy and truth to them that fear Him.

In youth we love near views. The world seems so large and strange that we shrink from it, and prefer soft dells and dim woodlands, in which Nature comes very close to us; valleys, in which the trees make a leafy bower over us, and shut us in safely from the great unknown wastes beyond. But as we advance in years we love, more and more, far views. We become familiar with the world. We realise what a small world it is, after all. We have seen an end of all perfection. The novelty and strangeness are gone from its scenes and experiences. We feel

our need of a new sphere of activity ; we long to be placed on a higher vantage-ground. We prefer, in consequence, the open, far-extending plain to the confined woodland ; the mountain-top to the depth of the valley. We prefer to look out from the narrow range of our being here to the land of far distances.

And the more we are imprisoned by circumstances, the more we are limited by trouble, the keener does this longing grow. It is when life becomes straiter by reason of sorrow and bereavement, that men of faith and hope see widely over the land of far distances. A finer atmosphere envelops their world, a vaster amplitude of light surrounds their being. It needs trouble in the soul to see the land of far distances, just as it needs the air to be saturated with latent vapour, in order to bring distant objects in the landscape near, and make every hue and line distinct. Behind a veil of perfectly clear, open sky the Alps at Macon are usually concealed as perfectly as behind a visible cloud ; but before a change of weather Mont Blanc shows itself distinctly, with its well-known snowy dome and dark aiguilles clear-cut against the sky, a hundred miles away. And so, in the spiritual world, sorrow makes the atmosphere of the soul so transparent that the things of eternity, that are usually unseen when all is well, become distinctly visible. Isaiah beheld the vision of the far-off years of the Church when he was sorely burdened. St. John, chained on his rock in the Ægean Sea, saw the heavens opened, and the glories of the

New Jerusalem, and the destiny of the world. Bunyan pictured in his prison-cell at Bedford the far-reaching view which the shepherds showed to the pilgrims from the Delectable Mountains. And so God is training His own people, by all the straits and imprisonments of life, to behold the splendour of the new creation. "Ye are come to Mount Zion," said the Apostle to the Hebrew Christians who were shut out from the courts of the temple. In the loss of their worldly privileges they were enabled to gain a larger vision of the Divine plan; to see, beyond the typical shadows of the vanishing dispensation, the enduring realities to which they pointed; and the tears of grief for their loss only washed their eyes from the dust, and made them clearer to behold that vision. And to us, too, who are distracted by the sad contentions of the Church, and the bitter conflicts of society, the same message of consolation is given. We are come to a point of view where, in the larger prospect beyond, the conflicting and apparently antagonistic elements of the present are reconciled in one glorious harmony, and are working out one mighty scheme of world-wide redemption.

The land of far distances! The image could only have originated in an Eastern country, where the atmosphere is so crystal clear that the remotest distances are visible. Our cloudy northern skies limit the horizon and circumscribe the view, and bring the heavens like a roof close to the earth. But in Eastern lands the brilliant sunshine and the

translucent air give the feeling of vast aerial space, and the heavens ascend to an infinite height. It is a large, open, radiant world, where, as in the old description of the Celtic heaven, "distance fades not on the sight, and nearness fatigues not the eye." Wandering recently over a moorland in Perthshire, on one of those perfect autumn days that are so rare in our climate, when earth seems a suburb of the celestial city, I saw, upwards of a hundred miles away, behind the blue hills that bounded the horizon, the summit of Ben Macdhui, which I had never seen before from this point, with the snow patches on it glancing white in the sun. That vision of the far-off mountain land glorified the whole landscape, introduced into it an element of grandeur and immensity before unknown. It reminded me irresistibly of the land of far distances of Isaiah, and gave a wonderful impressiveness to the beautiful image.

What a dull, dreary climate do we make in our souls through want of faith! How rarely do we have a day of spiritual clearness, in which we can see the things that are beyond the world of sense! Sin, unbelief, covetousness, selfishness, dim and circumscribe our horizon. We are content with the treadmill round of care and toil in which we spend mechanically our little life. Art-critics speak of some pictures as wanting in atmosphere. They are painted on the flat surface, and do not stand out living from the canvas, with the free air and sunshine about them. They have no sense of breadth

and freeness. We are oppressed when we look at them. So for the most part are our lives. There is no free atmosphere of heaven about them ; they have no perspective ; they are of the earth earthy. We live in our cares, we are buried in our troubles, we bear our hours of misery apart from the rest of our life and the blessed prospects of eternity. Oh, for a clearer atmosphere of the soul, for a stronger faith to give us a wider horizon, and bring the vision of the Great White Throne into our every-day life ; as the clearness of the autumnal day brought the snows of the highest peak of the Grampians into the familiar landscape of home I was surveying ! Such a vision would emancipate us from the thraldom of worldly things, and produce a boundless expansion and exhilaration of soul. We should no longer be conformed to the vain show of a passing world, but be transformed in the renewing of our minds by the powers of the world to come. The scenes of Nature, which, to the man who leaves the unseen out of account, are mere mechanical structures of matter and force, would be to us full of soul, and life, and love. In the hour of temptation, we should be able to overcome the inducement to prefer our present gain or pleasure to our future good. In the hour of sorrow, our eyes would take in the whole of life in this world and in the next, and see in its dark lines the contrast which gives effect and brilliancy to the general design, and works out the Divine pattern.

Let us seek, then, that our eyes may be thus opened and kept open, and our hearts purified, that we may behold the land of far distances—see, beyond the mists in which our fellows are groping, the things which have been shown to us by the Lord. For such a revelation is not merely fitted to fill the fancy with splendid optimistic dreams, but it is intensely practical, and is meant to change us into the image of that which we behold—to make our thoughts, our feelings, our actions, partake of the largeness and grandeur of our hopes.

XVIII

THE CHERUBIMS ON THE VAIL

"With cherubims shall it be made."—Ex. xxvi. 31.

THE Tabernacle in the wilderness was divided into two compartments—the holy place and the Holy of Holies—by a vail. That vail was stretched upon four pillars of wood overlaid with gold. It consisted of one huge screen of fine-twined linen, reaching from the roof to the floor, and from one side to the other. On the groundwork of linen were spread, in various ornamental patterns, the simple colours known to the ancients—blue, purple, and scarlet. The Holy of Holies was shut in by this vail from every human eye. No worship was carried on there. No human voice or step was heard within its sacred precincts. The priests worshipped in the holy place outside, but they were never allowed to pass within the vail; and only once a year was the High Priest himself permitted to enter—on the Great Day of Atonement, with the blood of the sacrifice—to make propitiation for the sins of the people. This awful solitude was the dwelling-place of God alone. The most conspicuous objects in it

were the ark and the mercy-seat, towards which all the ritual of the tabernacle converged as its centre and crown. On the top of the mercy-seat were two cherubims, formed out of its two ends, of the same mass of gold. Their faces were turned towards each other, and with their outstretched wings they covered the sacred shrine. Between them the Shechinah cloud, the token of God's presence, rested.

These cherubims were symbolic forms, composed of four representative creatures, the highest of their kind ; with the face of a man, of a lion, of an ox, and of an eagle, and with the human figure as the prominent and unifying part of the composite structure. They were meant to sum up and shadow forth the creation of God, with man at its head—the whole living world associated with man, not only as possessed of his own superior physical and spiritual nature, but also as endowed with the qualities of all the other animals, and so contributing to his ideal perfection. When first seen on earth, the cherubims were placed at the gate of the Garden of Eden, to keep the way of the tree of life. The flaming sword with which they were associated, which turned in every direction, was the witness of the terrible majesty of God's holiness which had been insulted by man's sin, telling our fallen first parents that so long as their sin continued, that symbol of God's judgment would shut up every avenue against their return to their original happy state. The cherubims, on the contrary, were placed there as an image of mercy

and hope, to signify that for the creation that had become alienated from God was destined a happy reconciliation. In the very place where man, and with him creation, had sinned and suffered, man and creation stood in a symbolical form by God's gracious appointment, to keep their privileges and to represent their restoration. The same great truth was signified by the golden cherubims that covered the mercy-seat with their wings, and between which God met and communed with the High Priest. The cloud of glory was the awful manifestation of the justice and holiness of God, like the flaming sword of Eden; but the cherubims indicated the interest of man, and with him of creation, in the work of redemption—represented not what man and creation actually are, but what they are destined to become, when the purpose of God in regard to them is accomplished.

Now, what I want to draw particular attention to is the fact that, secluded as was the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle, and guarded by the most solemn prohibitions, its mystery was not left altogether unknown. The most conspicuous feature of the vail —that which at once arrested every eye—was the cherubims embroidered over its whole surface, in such a way that it seemed to have been fashioned of nothing else. Thus, on the vail that concealed the awful shrine of Jehovah from mortal eye, was revealed one of the most characteristic and significant objects of that shrine. In this way the priests, who were not permitted to enter the Holy of Holies, could

have some conception of what was within it. Never once in all their lives could the priests behold the cherubims, between which, above the mercy-seat, was the symbol of God's presence. They would live and die without seeing those glorious realities; and yet, by God's merciful provision, every day that they ministered in the holy place they could see on the vail a picture of what was behind it. Nay more, the worshippers, who were not allowed to come into the holy place with the priests, but had to perform their worship outside in the court of the Tabernacle, even they could get a glimpse of what was within the vail; for, in the cunning work of the curtains that hung over the roof, and fell down over the back and sides of the Tabernacle, the cherubims of glory were embroidered with their expanded wings. The cherubims portrayed on the vail and on the curtains were no doubt faint and inadequate pictures of the originals on the mercy-seat. They could not have been otherwise. They were a flat representation of objects that stood out in the sacred shrine in fullest relief. They were an embroidery in perishing materials, at comparatively slight cost of labour, of a work of the highest art, beaten out in the purest gold, with the most unwearied industry and the most consummate skill. But with all these necessary imperfections, the needlework of the vail and of the curtains gave a fair idea of the cherubims which stood in the most holy place, in their invisible and unapproachable glory. The Jewish priests and wor-

shippers were not left in complete ignorance. There were witnesses to picture to them that which they could not see. They had shadows of the realities behind the vail. Their faith had elements of sight to support it. As Mrs. Browning says in "Casa Guidi Windows"—

> The self-same cherub faces which emboss
> The vail, lean inward to the mercy-seat.

I wish to make use of this most interesting fact as a graphic illustration of the great truth, which is true throughout the universe, that things concealed from us have their shadows manifested in the things we see. The universe is a great tabernacle divided by a vail and curtains into an outer and inner compartment, as it were. From the inner we are shut out, and we cannot see with our bodily eyes the things that are contained in it. And yet we have representations of these hidden mysteries before our eyes every day, which give us a more or less satisfactory idea of them. Here we see in part, and we prophesy in part. Here we see through a glass darkly; and yet there are revelations given to us in our common experiences, and in the things amid which we spend our daily life, of what is complete, and full-orbed, and transparently clear elsewhere, which are sufficient to sustain our energy and feed our hope.

The horizon, for instance, is a vail that comes down to conceal from us what is beyond. Many of us will never be able to visit foreign countries, and

ascertain with our own eyes what the nature of these countries and the mode of life in them may be; and yet, within the horizon in which we spend our life, we have shadowy intimations of the most distant regions of the earth. Ships come to us with their produce; our houses are full of objects brought from them; books describe them to us; and letters from friends make us partakers of their larger experience. Even the scenery around our homes is not so dissimilar to that of foreign lands as we should suppose. Travellers tell us that in foreign countries, what strikes them most at first sight is not the strange, but the familiar, look of the general landscape. Indeed, the more extensive our acquaintance becomes with other countries, the more numerous do we find the features which they possess in common with our own, the more numerous do we find the representative forms of life and dead matter which they possess in common with each other.

Between us and the lofty summits of a great mountain range there is a vail often woven of cloud and mist. Elevated far above the busy commonplace haunts of man, these sublime peaks seem to dwell apart, to retire into a more awful solitude than exists on the surface of the earth. We long for the wings of the eagle, to surmount in a moment all intervening obstacles, and reach the shores of that upper world, that we may know what new forms of life occur in a region so near to and so favoured of the skies. To many destitute of the requisite

strength of limb or lung to climb these peaks, or chained hopelessly to the daily task, this must ever be an unattainable enjoyment—in sight, and yet unknown. And yet the lofty summit of the mountain sends down into the valley, by the streams that channel its flanks, waifs of brilliant Alpine flowers, which take root and grow among the common lowland plants; and thus the dweller at the foot of the mountain knows what kind of vegetation abounds in the upper regions as truly as if he had actually scaled the heights. Many who live far inland have a vail of mountain ranges between them and the great ocean. And yet, up the reaches of the quiet inland river, into the midst of shady woods, the ocean sends its tidal waters, its fresh invigorating breezes, or its white-winged sea-birds; so that the inland inhabitants may have some idea of the vast world of waters that extends far beyond their horizon. The vail of daylight hides from us the other worlds in space; and the darkness of night which brings out the stars only increases their mystery. But the vail which conceals also reveals. Spectrum analysis has made known to us the chemistry of the sun and stars, the physical constitution of the most distant worlds; and this knowledge is given not by the brightness of light, but by the dark spaces which cross the spectrum, and are as significant as the shadows of the dial. This wonderful science shows to us that the substances of the stars are identical with those of our own earth. Not

a single new or unknown element has been discovered in the remotest stellar ray subjected to its scrutiny. The meteors that fall from the inter-planetary spaces to our earth are made up of the same metals with which we are familiar, and hold shut up in their cavities the same gases which form our common air and water. And thus the sunbeams, moonbeams, and starbeams bind with chains of gold and silver our world to the worlds of space; and our feelings take possession of the silent fields of the sky, include them within the sacred precincts of home, and people them with our human sympathies. Upon the very vails that separate us from the inmost and remotest sanctuaries of Nature, we see impressed the images of the objects which they hide from our view.

But it is not only natural things that thus reveal themselves by that which conceals them; the realities of the spiritual world are also manifested to us on the vail of earthly things. The things that are unseen and eternal are illustrated by the things that are seen and temporal. We have numberless analogies in Nature which make plain to our understandings the mysteries of grace. Every object around us may be used to shadow forth spiritual truth. Our Lord revealed to His disciples and to the multitude what the kingdom of heaven was like, by showing to them its shadows on the vail of common objects and common processes, in His parables. The kingdom of heaven is like everything we see and deal with. Things visible answer to

things spiritual, as in the calm mirror of the lake below we see the reflection of the sky above. The beautiful landscape we see touches within us a secret sense of still more beautiful and perfect scenery—the original within the vail of which the earthly landscape is only the rough draft and copy. To us it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, if we not only see and admire the fair colours of the vail, but also comprehend the meaning of the cherubims embroidered upon it; if we have eyes to see, and ears to hear, and hearts to understand the revelation which God is giving to us in the common things that are around us. God has never left Himself without natural witnesses of His spiritual things. His invisible things from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.

The mysteries of grace are the common heritage of all. Whatever differences of education and intellectual ability may divide human beings from each other, on the grounds of moral feelings and religious truths they all stand on the same level. In every human being there is a foundation for the fabric of Christian character; and the Gospel is built upon the sense of sin, and the longing for forgiveness, which is in the nature of every one. Even the profoundest mysteries of God's infinity and personality are not unsuitable to the humblest capacity. His incomprehensibility, by the very teaching of natural religion itself, is felt to be His

glory; and man has a sense of sacred joy in this shadow of the Divine falling upon him. It harmonises with the immeasurableness of the things he sees—the sky, and the ocean, and the boundlessness of space, and with that infinite craving for the marvellous and stupendous which is a part of every man's nature. The little child is enabled to understand the mystery of the Divine love, from what it learns of the patience and self-sacrifice of human love at a mother's knee. The youngest person can see the meaning of the great truths of salvation, in some measure, by the help of the figures of them which his own experience presents to him. The doctrine of the Atonement is in remarkable keeping with the sympathetic nature which God has imparted to us, by which we feel for others, and can therefore understand how one person may carry his loving-kindness to such an extent as to give his life for his friend. The forgiveness of God has a shadow of it in the sorrow which all truly sensitive minds feel when they have offended one dear to them, and in the joy which the sense of being reconciled and accepted by the one from whom their faults had estranged them imparts. There is thus not a mystery of the Holy of Holies of Divine truth but may be seen in dim yet true shape, embroidered as it were upon the vail of our own common instincts and experiences.

But I go on further to show that the realities of the eternal world are manifested to us by the things

of time. The vail of death, which no human hand can lift, hides the scenes beyond from our view. Death is a solitary experience. Each human being has to die alone; and no one has come back from the other side of the grave to tell us what it is to die, to disclose to us what there is to know; and there are moods in which we are tempted to think that there is nothing to know, that the heaven which our fond imagination pictures, is only like the stained-glass window with which the builder seeks to hide the darkness of a blank wall outside. But such sceptical and despondent moods are evanescent. They vanish, and we come back to the faith of our childhood in the happy land. The Bible speaks to us of the existence of that happy land, and discloses its glory in forms which far transcend our earthly imagination. It calls our future home a new heaven and a new earth: not new in the sense of being before unknown, but new in the sense of restoration; the very terms implying that it will correspond to, and exhibit in brighter manifestation, all that is pure and lovely in the heaven and earth which now appear. The ascension of our Lord to heaven, with all the attributes of perfect man, the resurrection of man in a body strictly identical with his present body, prove beyond doubt that the scene of our translation, with all its circumstances, must be accommodated to the nature of man. The blessed of the Father are to inherit the kingdom *prepared* for them from the foundation of the world; and that kingdom is often

spoken of in Scripture as an inheritance. The very idea of an inheritance implies previous acquaintance and familiarity. An heir grows up gradually from infancy in the midst of what is to be his own property when he reaches his majority. With the scenes of his future state are connected all the tender associations of his childhood and youth. He passes insensibly, without any abrupt or startling transition, from the condition of an heir to that of a proprietor. Now, so will it be with us in regard to the future state. From the very constitution of our nature, we form our anticipations of the future from our past. The objects and experiences of earth are preparations for those which await us above. On the vail that hides our future home from us, we see pictured the cherubims of glory. The cherubims of the shrine are the same as those on the vail. Earthly forms hold possession of the heavenly places.

Heaven is "filled with objects long endeared to us, and with pleasures which we have already enjoyed in part, and learned from the foretaste to long for the full fruition." We have now the earnest of the purchased possession — the first-fruits of the great harvest. Fore-shinings of the heavenly land appear to us, as Canaan shone to Moses from the crest of Pisgah. In our higher moments it seems not as if we saw the cherubims vividly displayed on the vail, but as if the vail itself had become transparent, or a corner of it had been lifted to show to us the glories that shall one day be ours, when every vail shall

be removed, and the whole universe shall be in sight.

Now, what is the practical outcome of thoughts like these? What lessons for the conduct of life do we learn from the fact, that the cherubims of the spiritual and eternal worlds are revealed to us on the vails of earthly things and earthly experiences? Does it not teach us that we have no excuse for sinful ignorance, seeing that God has brought within the range of our touch and vision, in earthly images, His perfect heavenly things, and placed us so that we can understand the things that belong to our spiritual life by the things that belong to our daily life? Do not these glimpses and foreshadowings of unseen and eternal things also inspire us with a deeper interest in them? Instead of having a sense of vagueness and unreality connected with heavenly things, offering nothing upon which the heart and the mind can fix, we learn to love them—to set our affections upon them, and live under their transforming power, because they are already partially ours. And more than all, does not the fact of the cherubims on the vail being the same as those in the shrine, show to us that our life is continuous here and hereafter—that it is one history and one development? It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we have in our own bodies and souls premonitions of our future state.

It is a common idea that death will make a great change. You lie down in the sleep of death with a

selfish, grovelling spirit and a pampered and corrupted body, and you imagine that you are to wake up with a spirit perfect in every attribute, and a body pure and immortal. You imagine that somehow, through God's mercy, you will pass into a state of blessedness of which you have no foretaste or anticipation here, and of which your own experience can bear no testimony. You have some vague idea that your happiness will consist in exercises and enjoyments for which you have no relish here, and in perfect communion with that God with whose nature your hearts are at enmity now. Surely the whole analogy of Scripture teaches you that, just as the circumstances in which Providence has placed you here, must have some affinity to that more advanced state of being to which you aspire, so equally must your moral character here correspond with the moral conditions of that higher world. How, then, can you expect to be fit for heaven if you have served no apprenticeship to holiness on earth, if you have not been taught in the school of this world the very rudiments of heavenly learning? The Apostle speaks of hoping to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. You may expect or desire what you please; but "you can only hope for that which you have a right to believe will come." You can only hope and wait for the full revelation of the Lord Jesus, if you have Christ formed in you now, the hope of glory; if you have already in your quickened heart the bud, of

which that revelation is the expanded blossom and fruit.

If you are to behold and enjoy the glorious cherubims of the heavenly world, you must have them represented as it were on the vail of your earthly tabernacle. Your hearts must be tuned now to the heavenly harmonies. Your souls must now be restored by Divine grace to the Divine image; your bodies must have all their powers and senses trained to purity and righteousness. You must exercise yourselves unto that godliness which hath the promise of the life to come, as well as of the life that now is. And in proportion as you exercise yourselves unto godliness, so will that promise be fulfilled—you will realise your own immortality, and anticipate the full fruition of heaven. When certain conditions of light are present, if you look through a window at a particular angle into the street, you see a flame, apparently outside, flickering strangely in the air. It is only the reflection of the fire in the room on the window-pane. Is not the heaven you see beyond the window of this life, the projected reflection of your present experience? What you are now determines your future; and the heaven of each man is just what he himself makes it, according as the fire of love and holiness burns more or less brightly on the hearth of his heart.

XIX

THE KEYS OF DEATH

"And have the keys of death."—Rev. i. 18.

In heraldry a key is used as a symbol to denote some State office, as that of Chamberlain of the Court, and is therefore often wrought with care and skill, and highly ornamented. The insignia of the Papacy are two keys, one of silver and the other of gold, crossing each other; because the Pope assumes the prerogative of St. Peter, who had the keys of heaven committed to him. To give over the key of a house is to obtain possession of the house. To hold the keys of a prison is to have authority over the captives who are bound in its cells. Keys often figure in official ceremonies. When the Commissioner of the General Assembly of the Scottish Church comes as the representative of the Queen to Holyrood Palace every May, the keys of the city of Edinburgh, according to an old custom, are handed to him by the chief magistrate, in token that during his period of authority the city is to be under his government. In connection with the Tower of London, there is a very ancient ceremony still per-

formed every day, called the "closing of the gates." As soon as the hour of midnight strikes, the yeoman porter, accompanied by a guard of six private soldiers and a sergeant, proceeds to the great outer gate and closes it. Having locked it, he returns, carrying the huge keys, duly followed by his escort. As he passes the sentries on his way back to the main guard, each of them challenges him with the question, "Who goes there?" to which he replies, "The Keys"; and when further asked, "What Keys?" he answers, "The Queen's Keys,"—which are then taken by the yeoman porter to the governor's house, and placed in his office. This elaborate ceremony, which is scrupulously observed every night, originated from the fact that every serious disturbance in London had led to an attack upon the Tower, which is universally believed to hold the key of the possession of the city.

Jesus appeared in vision to John in the Isle of Patmos, with the keys of death hanging at His girdle, in accordance with the old custom whereby the keys of a conquered city were given up to the conqueror when it capitulated. He came to the Apostle not, you will observe, from the deathless realms of heaven, but from the dark region of death. Long before, He appeared to Isaiah in the image of a Conqueror who had come to the help of Israel from Edom, the very country where dwelt their bitterest foes, who gave them the greatest trouble and anxiety. He came from the land of the enemy,

where He encountered him on his own territory, in the midst of all his own resources. And so the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to John as a Conqueror who had come up from the very realm of death, where He had fought the terrible foe in his own domains, and with his own weapons. It was not as God, by the exercise of almighty power, that He triumphed; but as man, by uttermost submission. He won His victory not outside and above death, as One whom it could not assail; but through death, by Himself becoming dead, and entering into the dark world of death. It behoved Him to be made in all things like unto His brethren, when He came into our world and into our nature; and as death is the inevitable end of every human being, so He passed under its power as our brother, because we must pass under it. He became subject to its conditions, as every child of Adam must become.

And this He did of His own free will. There was no fatal necessity compelling Him, as in our case. No one could take His life from Him. He owed it to no broken law, or higher authority which He had sinned against, and whose punishment He must suffer. It was absolutely His own. He had power to lay it down of His own accord. He was the only one of all the sons of men who was born expressly to die—to be a vicarious sacrifice for men—and yet who possessed the singular power of surrendering His unforfeited life by His own free choice. And He had power to take up His life

again. He had, wonderful to say, power to act even when dead—to revive His life by the exercise of His own will when life was extinct. This was a power altogether unique and unparalleled. Never before, and never since, was there another instance of self-revival on the part of one who had been dead. All other cases of resuscitation had been accomplished by an external force—the raising of Lazarus, of the widow of Nain's son, and of the Shunammite's child; and on the last Great Day, the dead shall be summoned out of the dust of ages, to live again by an outside authority. But the supreme marvel of Christ's resurrection was, that no supernatural voice broke His slumber or loosed His bonds. He raised Himself by His own power. Like a mightier Samson, He snapped asunder the green withs of death, and arose and bore the gates of the city of the grave, up the hill of God — destroyed him that had the power of death, and carried captivity captive.

And this self-caused resurrection of Christ is what entitles Him to be declared "the Son of God with power." It was not death that our Lord carried with Him into the grave, but eternal life—the very life of all lives; and thus He solved the great problem of the universe. He showed that life and not death is the enduring principle; that death is not the final end of life, but only an episode or incident in its continuous existence, a dark cloud that for a while overshadows but cannot extinguish it, a

transient sleep into which it sinks, only to awake refreshed and renewed. He has won, not a single victory only, but an eternal mastery—a triumph in which it has been settled forever that the future is to be a realm of life, and that death itself is to die. It is a victory which He has won for, and will complete in, every human being who puts his trust in Him. And now He holds the keys of death, not for His own glorification, but as a sacred trust for the deliverance and triumph over the grave of all who, believing, have life through His name.

It was no mere shadow or appearance of death through which our Lord passed. It was a tremendous reality. All the forces of death were concentrated in the strife. Nor did He escape scathless. The Conqueror who in Isaiah's vision came from Edom, travelling in the greatness of His might, had His garments stained with blood—His own blood as well as that of the foe, to show how dearly-won was the triumph. And so the mighty Victor who appeared to John from the inmost realm of death, had the awful tokens of the struggle still upon Him—the wounds of the cross; and we see what it has cost Him to save us. And therefore He can sympathise with us and help us as no other can, when we too are called upon to grapple with the same foe.

Through the narrow gate of death, all the generations of men have passed in an unceasing procession, since the first death outside the walls of Eden. And up to the narrow gate every one of us is slowly

walking, drawing nearer and nearer every day. That gate, which only opens inwards, bounds our horizon. We have a craving to pick its lock and see for ourselves what is beyond. But Jesus does not satisfy this craving. He did not tell His disciples, during His last interview with them, what He had seen and heard in the intermediate world. He had burst asunder the brazen gates of the grave; He had recrossed the dread river, and retraced His steps up the dark valley into the light of the living. But He told them nothing of the mystery of the unseen world. Like the true, earnest Teacher He was, He left all that mystery in the stern keeping of death. He only opened their understandings that they might understand the Scriptures. And He says to us that, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

It is enough for us to know that there is a future beyond the grave; that it is filled with the presence and the love of One who passed into it by the way that we must all go, and who will guide the way through it for those who die in Him. He has the keys not only of power but of experience. He knows what it is to die; and He will give the key of His experience to us, and show us how best to pass through the darkness into the light. Every pain and sorrow that He endured in dying, put into His hand the key of that tragic experience, to un-

lock it for every soul that trusts in Him. It was an iron key to Him, with the rust of all the ages on it; for no man in heaven or earth was able to open that door or to use that key; and with sore difficulty, even in His pierced hand, did it turn the lock and withdraw the bar. We read how in the dark Italian ages wicked men, wishing to get rid of inconvenient persons, compassed their death in a most treacherous fashion. They contrived that their unsuspecting victims should use for some household purpose a key ingeniously made, with a small sharp point in the handle, tipped with a deadly poison, which, when pressed, would inflict an imperceptible but fatal wound. And so, the key by which Christ opened the door of death had in its handle the sharp sting of the curse, and all its virulent poison passed into the mortal wound, and exhausted itself there, and so the key is now harmless to every one who uses it in His name. It is a golden key to us, opening a gate of pearl; for we have the advantage of Christ's experience and the benefit of His triumph. The oil of His grace makes it turn easily in the lock, and it will seem, in the company of the Lord of life and immortality, passing in with Him through the shadow of death into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, as if there were no resistance at all—as if the iron door had opened to us of its own accord. Death in such a case has for us only shot the bolt outside the lock, so that it cannot catch, and it gives way when we touch it.

I wish you to notice particularly the words which our Lord spoke to the Apostle. They are full of the deepest significance. He does not say, "I have the key of death," as if there were only one door to this invisible realm. He uses the plural number, and says, "I have the *keys* of death," implying that there is more than one door. We speak about the hundred gates of ancient Thebes, and of the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem. But death has myriads of gates. The way out of life is different in different individuals. No two persons die in the same way. There is some peculiarity of time, or place, or age, or circumstance, or method, which differentiates every case. Human beings die as children, as grown-up men and women, and as aged persons; they die at different seasons, at different hours, by different ailments, in different circumstances. Death is an intensely individualising process. It separates a man from his fellows and from the world. It breaks the closest ties of husband and wife, mother and child. It separates soul from body. It takes a human being out of the crowd to die alone. It is the loneliest of all things. It is the veriest isolation. Thousands may die in the fury of a battle, or in the visitation of a plague; but each man, in this wholesale mode of death, quits life by himself, and in a way peculiar to himself.

Now, of all these myriads of doors, Jesus, who tasted death for all men, and exhausted on the cross all the possibilities of dying, has the keys. It

is He who opens each. The time and the mode of a man's death are not in his own power; he has no control whatever over these. They are in the hands of his Creator and Redeemer; in the hands of Him who died for us and rose again. Now, what does this great truth imply? It obviously implies two things: first, that Christ determines the best time and mode for each human being to die; and secondly, that the fact of Christ Himself opening the door for each of us is a proof that He will be with us to the last. Let us look briefly at these two points.

1. Christ determines the best time and mode for each human being to die. Martha said to Jesus, "If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." But she little knew that Jesus had been there, and that it was just because He had been there, that her brother had died. It was Christ's own doing and appointment. He designed that the fever should terminate fatally. That was the door by which Lazarus was to issue out of life, for the glory of God, that the Son of Man might be glorified thereby. And what was true of this one remarkable instance, is true in every case. It is only a sample of a universal experience, in which the microscope of God's own visible dealing reveals to us on a larger scale, and in a clearer and more striking way, what He is carrying out invisibly in the ordinary circumstances of life. We may say of every case, it is because Christ has been here

that our beloved one has died. This death, which darkens all our homes and all our life, is but the overshadowing of His wings. It is His own hand that has opened the door for our dead out of life into the great Beyond. We put the keys of death into the hands of diseases and accidents, and the decays of old age. A celebrated author has called the various poisons and narcotics—the fatal powers that are hidden in the serpent's bite, and the virulent juice of the flower and leaf—"the keys of death." And truly there are potent spells in these deadly things to quench the strongest life, and bid the soul let go its firmest hold of the body. The researches of modern science reveal to us what dangers to life lurk in the food we eat, and the water we drink, and the air we breathe. There are germs and microbes that seem to hold our life in their microscopic hands; from which we cannot escape. But all these are only Christ's instrumentalities. They could have had no power at all against us, were it not given to them by our Lord.

The keys are of no avail without a hand to use them. The Greeks of old did not give the destiny of man over to impersonal powers. They had a glimpse of the truth in their myth of the three weird sisters, daughters of the night, who spun, and held, and cut the thread of life. Atropos, the inevitable, was represented with the fatal shears, or pointing to the hour of death on a dial. And this myth showed that the dark and inexplicable powers of fate belonged

not to mere things, but to a living personal agency; and thereby pointed to the great first personal Cause. Jesus keeps the keys of death in His own hands; and He uses the second causes of death as His servants. And therefore it is the Lord Himself who lets us depart in His own good time and way. We speak about dying prematurely; but if each person has a special door to go out of life at, and if Christ has the key of each of these doors, there can be no such thing as premature death. We cannot suppose that Christ would cut short a life arbitrarily or capriciously. The time He has chosen must be the best time. In His infinite wisdom, He who has our times in His hands, knows what age or season, or mode of departure will suit all the requirements of the case. He sees the end from the beginning, and can make no mistake in appointing our destiny. Jesus Himself said, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" Each human being has his appointed period of life on earth, his own twelve hours, and nothing can possibly shorten that span, till the last moment of the twelfth hour has struck the knell of doom.

Two reasons suggest themselves to us for the differences in the time and mode of death of human beings. One seems to be in order to produce that variety in the future world which adds so much to the happiness and usefulness of this. We are not all of one age here. There are children and grown-up persons and aged persons mingling together in

the same home, and in the same social circle. How monotonous and uninteresting would life be were it otherwise! And can we suppose that a similar variety will not be perpetuated in the world beyond death? The prophet Zechariah saw the vision of the restored earthly Jerusalem as a city in which old men and old women should dwell, "every man with his staff in his hand for very age," and whose streets should also be full of boys and girls playing in them. That prophecy was meant to reach farther than the Jewish city. It is the picture of what the Church of Christ should be; and it is a revelation of wha the heavenly Jerusalem shall be. We have, indeed, every reason to believe that not only will the differences of character and talent and experience which human beings exhibit here, be manifested on the other side of the grave, but that there will be, besides these diversities, the varieties of development produced by the different ages at death. The child, the youth, the middle-aged man, the old, will mingle with one another there as they mingle here, and brighten their mutual association by the special excellences that are appropriate to each age. All the inhabitants of heaven will be gifted with eternal youth; but that universal youthfulness will consist not in years, but in undecaying freshness and vigour, and will not be incompatible with those differences of age upon which He who knew when it was best to remove them, had at death set His final seal. They shall never grow old; the glory of heaven will never

bring wrinkles and gray hair; and the flight of millenniums will leave them unchanged. But those ages of life at which their growth here was stopped, and which in the oldest are but as a moment compared to eternity, will preserve forever, amid all the transfigurations of the glorified state, much of the qualities which distinguish them here—the fresh, unconscious grace of the young, the calm fortitude and endurance of those of older years, and the ripe experience and wisdom of the aged. It is in order, therefore, that heaven may have the variety which is the great characteristic of all God's works, and which is so cheering and necessary in the world of mankind here, that Christ opens the door out of life for human beings at different ages.

Another reason, we may presume, is that Christ must choose the best moment to call His children out of the world. We have our own ideas about a worthy departure out of life. We must be dressed in our best clothes, as it were. We must have a time of special preparation, and we must be engaged in what we think a suitable task, and be in a proper frame of mind. We must gather our robes around us and fall with dignity and grace, as Cæsar fell at the foot of Pompey's statue. But our ideas of the best time and mode of dying are not always God's ideas. By sudden accident, by some swift disease, in familiar places and in the midst of our ordinary employments, the fatal summons may come. Our Lord appoints for some the field of strife, the

martyr's fire and the gloomy dungeon, and for others the peaceful deathbed and the long, gradual decay, surrounded by loving friends. And often the circumstances that seem to us the most painful and trying, are the most suitable for His gracious purpose. The photographer chooses the moment when we are looking our best to take our portrait; not when we are stiff and constrained, and elaborately got up for the purpose, but when we are free and natural, with an unconscious smile lighting up our face, and revealing our true character. And so He who has the keys of death selects the very time when life has completed its development, and assumes its fairest aspect, to fix its image in the enduring colours of immortality. That period may be soon or late; and if the blossom is not produced, the foliage puts on the premature beauty of the flowering, the leaf becomes a blossom. All whom Christ calls into eternity in His own time and way are, to use the old expression of the classic authors regarding those who were removed from this world in auspicious circumstances, *felices opportunitate mortis* —happy in the opportunity of death.

2. But I must briefly conclude with the other suggestion of my text to which I referred, viz. that the fact of Christ's opening the door for each of us is a proof that He will be with us to the end of life. Each human being is marked off from every other by his own personal history. There is an essential loneliness in each human experience. And this

loneliness comes to a point in time of trial. We feel lonely in sorrow, and, as I have already said, loneliest of all in death. The world in which the living around us move and act, is no longer our world ; and we feel our individuality more intensely in our last hours than ever before. But we are thus shut out from all human fellowship that we may be shut in more closely with Him who is nearer than hands and feet, nearer than our own souls. What affects us most in the pathetic death of the great Jewish lawgiver on the lonely mountain-top, is the personal dealing of God with him. No human friend was with him in his last moments ; no ceremonies or rites of that Levitical religion which it was his great mission to inaugurate, and which strengthened and moulded his life, were there to support and hallow his departing spirit. These followed him only to the foot of the hill, and in the cloud that wrapped him round on the summit, he saw no man save God only. All his comfort and fortitude came directly from God Himself. And what strikes us most deeply in the Psalmist's description of the walk through the valley of the shadow of death, is the remarkable change in the pronoun which he uses from the third to the second person. In the green pastures, and beside the still waters of health and joy and life, he is content to speak of God as afar off, in the third person, and say, "*He* maketh me to lie down in green pastures : *he* leadeth me beside the still waters."

But as he passes into the awful loneliness of the dark valley, and the shadows gather and thicken around him, he reaches forth to catch the Almighty hand, and he says, in the second person, "*Thou* art with me; *thy* rod and *thy* staff they comfort me." And so, what most comes home to our heart in the vision of John, is the thought of Christ's especial nearness and help in the unutterable solitude of the last hour of life, supplying Himself the latest wants of the being He has made and redeemed.

My text gives us the blessed assurance that He who has the keys of death opens with His own hand the door out of life for each of us, and must therefore of necessity be with us in death and through death. Friends, the nearest and dearest may follow us up to the door, but He goes with us through it. His face will be the last we shall see on this side, and the first on the other side. Nay, He will be with us in the passage between. The sense of a beloved presence with us, more than anything else, prevents dread. And there is nothing to fear in the case of those who feel themselves thus guided and guarded by the hand of Infinite Love. Like Christian and Hopeful, they have the key in their own bosom that opens every lock in Doubting Castle. They have Christ formed in them, the hope of glory. His presence illumines the darkness of the transition. And oh, how dazzling will be the vision when He opens the door on the other side! I remember on one occasion

how glorious was the common daylight that appeared at the mouth of an underground cave, where I had been a long time in the profound gloom. It seemed as if it were a new splendour which I had never seen before. But as shadow unto sunshine will be all earth's light, compared to the dazzling effulgence that shall one day burst upon our sight, when we pass through the door which Christ's key has opened for us into the eternal world.

> Death is another life. We bow our heads
> At going out, we think, and enter straight
> Another golden chamber of the King's,
> Larger than this and lovelier.

XX

THE FOLDED NAPKIN

"And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself."—St. John xx. 7.

HAVE you ever examined in April one of the sticky buds of a horse-chestnut tree, when it is swollen and about to open and set free the young leaves in the inside of it? If so, you must have been struck with the wonderful way in which the leaves were packed in it. No human skill could have folded these leaves and put them so neatly and compactly in their case. This arrangement is called vernation; and it differs in different trees, each having its own method, and following a special law. In some cases the young leaves are simply folded, in others they are rolled, and in others they are plaited lengthways or sideways. The study of this subject is a most fascinating one, and cannot fail to impress the mind deeply with the wonderful order of creation.

Now, the unfolding of the buds in spring is the annual type of the Resurrection. This is Easter Sunday, and the great truth which it brings before us is the Resurrection of Christ. This is the truth

which Nature is now preaching; for its new life is rising up out of dormant root and bud everywhere, and revealing its fresh green loveliness to the spring sunshine. And just as the unfolding of all this miracle of new beauty is accompanied with the casting off of the old coverings in which it was wrapped, the young leaves losing the scales in which they were imprisoned all winter, so Jesus, in rising from the dead, left behind in the tomb the grave-clothes in which He was wrapped. And we notice in the way in which the napkin and the linen clothes were arranged in the forsaken tomb, the same wonderful care and order which we see in the packing of the young leaves, and the arrangement of the scales around them, in the buds of the trees. The grave-clothes were not dropped off anyhow, and left in a confused way where they fell. They were carefully folded and put each in its own place.

There are several important lessons which this incident of the Resurrection teaches. The first is the reality of the event. The rising again of a dead body from the tomb is such a transcendent phenomenon that many find it exceedingly hard to believe it. And some do not hesitate to say that the disciples were deceived, or fancied that they actually saw what must have been a mere vision or illusion of their excited senses. Now, in the fairy stories and fables with which you are familiar, there is an utter absence of detail. All is vague and general. They do not tell you the exact date when,

or the exact place where, the wonderful thing which they describe took place. They merely say that once upon a time, long ago, in some far-away region, it happened. But the Gospel narrative is quite different. It is full of little graphic touches and particulars of time and place and circumstance, which would never have been introduced if the story had been invented. No one would have thought of describing the grave-clothes as lying in the tomb in such a strange way, if the thing had not been actually seen by the disciples. It is what is called circumstantial evidence of the truthfulness of the account, one of those vivid descriptive traits which tell of the eye-witness. It is of a piece with the little incident of John outrunning Peter, and being first at the sepulchre, which would naturally be the case, as John was younger than Peter; and also with the characteristic fact that it was the bold Peter who entered the empty sepulchre, while the timid, gentle John contented himself with merely hurriedly looking in at the entrance. In coming across these graphic particulars, you feel that it is not a fable, but a true story that you are reading. And just as the disciples were convinced, by seeing the grave-clothes in the empty tomb, of the resurrection of Christ, so you share in their conviction. That little circumstance helps you, like a water-mark in the narrative, to believe in it, and to realise it as a great historical fact.

Another lesson which you learn from the carefully arranged grave-clothes in the tomb of Jesus, is the

wonderful calmness with which He rose from the dead. There was no haste, no excitement, no confusion. The event took place with the utmost deliberateness. Like a mightier Samson, He broke the bands of death, and took time to lay the linen clothes in one place, and the napkin in a spot by itself. What a contrast between the perplexed and hurrying disciples and the calmness and order of the tomb! The earthquake shook the rocks around; an angel rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre; the guard of Roman soldiers was struck with mortal fear; the women who came early to the tomb were affrighted. Everywhere else there was haste and dismay and noise, but in the inside of the sepulchre there was a profound restfulness, as in the calm centre of a revolving storm. Jesus rose from the dead, and quietly proceeded to arrange His grave-clothes in the tomb, amid the roar of the elements and the wonders and terrors of the supernatural display, just as you would fold your nightdress in the morning after rising from a refreshing night's sleep.

And is not this Christ's way always? He belongs to the eternal world, in which there is no need for haste as in this world, for a thousand years to Him are as one day. He is unresting and unhasting in all His work, like a ray of sunshine that comes to the eye with a speed which cannot be conceived, and yet is as still and restful as if it did not move at all. In the field of Nature, how slowly and calmly does the dawning come to the

night, and the spring to the old year! Without noise, with a secret, gradual growth, the light of morning brightens into the perfect day, and the beauty of the green fields and woods passes on to the fulness of summer. There is no leaf or flower impatient of its fellows, hasting to get some advantage for itself; and it is a delightful relief to turn from the busy, bustling scenes of human life to the sublime calm of creation.

And as Jesus thus folds with calmness and deliberateness, the robes with which He clothes the grass of the field, so calmly and deliberately does He act in the world of men. He stood still on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem, though His face was steadfastly set to go up to the cross to work out the salvation of the world, and waited until the blind man was brought to Him to be cured. He found leisure and tranquillity on the way to Jairus's house to cure the woman with the issue of blood, though the business that awaited Him was one of life and death. And He is the same still. President Lincoln once told a story of a little child in a steamer going down the Ohio, whose apple had fallen overboard, and who asked the captain to stop the boat that it might be picked up; and he applied it to the case of one who wanted him to stop the great business of the State and attend to some unimportant whim. But what a great and busy man cannot do, Jesus can do. He can rise from the throne of glory, as Stephen saw Him in his dying agony, to

help His saints in their extremity ; and He can pause, as it were, in the mightiest operations of His hands, in order to minister to the necessities of the poorest sufferer. He is never in haste. He waits to be gracious. He knows the best time to interfere. And He is always, as the Ruler of the world and all its vast interests, at leisure to consider the case of each one of you, if you ask Him in prayer, just as if there were no more important wants than yours in the whole universe. Jesus is risen from the dead for the very purpose of giving you His own heavenly life, His own calm spirit, to enable you to copy His own tranquil method of doing things, to fulfil each duty as it arises ; and so you will have leisure for every call that is made upon you, and your peace of mind will keep you from wearing out your life prematurely by haste and anxiety.

Another lesson which the text teaches is Christ's attention to little things. When bursting the bars of death, its first and final Conqueror, you would have thought that Jesus had far greater things to do and to think of, than to be occupied with merely folding up the linen clothes that were about His dead body, and laying them in order apart. You would have thought such an insignificant detail, at such a tremendous moment, unworthy of His attention. But nothing was ever too trivial for His notice. As Emerson says—

> There is no great or small,
> To the soul that maketh all.

The microscope has shown to you in a most wonderful way how minute and careful is God's work in the smallest objects; how He finishes the sting of the nettle and the wing of the fly with the utmost patience and perfection of skill. He weighs the mountains in scales, and preserves the stars in their orbits, and yet He feeds the grass with dew, fills the little lungs of the bee with air, and numbers the hairs of your head. And on this patience of detail and infinite care for little things, all the welfare and glory of the created universe rest.

And was not this the Divine method of Jesus too? His thoughtful care for the napkin in the tomb was an entirely characteristic act. It revealed what was perhaps the most wonderful peculiarity of His nature. His great work of redemption was enough to engross His whole time and energy; and yet He noticed the commonest things of life and nature, and made parables of them to illustrate the kingdom of heaven. He attended to the humblest wants of His followers, noticed the touch of the solitary woman in the crowd, sought out the blind man whom He cured, and confirmed his faith; commanded meat to be given to the little girl whom He raised from the dead, and spoke the beautiful parable of the shepherd who left the ninety and nine sheep in the fold, and went out into the wilderness in search of the single lost one.

And should not this attention of Jesus to little things be a pattern and example for your own

work, and encourage you in it? You are tempted like the man who had only one talent, and who folded it up in a napkin and hid it in the earth, to think that you are too insignificant to do anything of value with the powers you possess, and in the small sphere in which you are placed. But Christ says to you, "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much." God has some use to put you to, when you give yourself to Him—a use which no one else but you can fulfil. Find out that use, and occupy with your one talent, and do your best with it; and though you are poor and feeble, the Lord will perfect that which concerneth you. It is not by great things that God Himself touches your heart, but by little things. It is by trifles of gentle words and loving acts, little in themselves, but oft repeated, and meaning much for the love's sake that is in them, that the members of a family are bound to one another so closely that neither life nor death can sever them. In the conduct of life, it is by attention to little things that success is secured. It is by the way you act in the small concerns with which you have to deal every day, that the worth of life is determined. It is by beginning in little things, that you learn the lesson which you have to practise in great things. The folded napkin, then, may well remind you to live to God in the small details of your daily life, and so to build up by God's grace a finished character, which, like that of Christ Himself, will be the result

of innumerable resistances to little temptations, and innumerable performances of ordinary duties.

Another lesson which you learn from the incident of the text, is the orderliness of Jesus Christ. The napkin was left, doubtless, to mark out the part of the tomb where the head had lain, and the linen clothes were left to mark the place where the feet had been. The head was crowned with thorns, the feet were pierced with nails, and in the places where these wounded parts of the body had lain, Mary Magdalene saw afterwards two angels in white sitting, bringing to them the glory of heaven. There was thus a deep reason for the remarkable order in which the grave-clothes were arranged in the tomb. And this orderliness is characteristic of all the work of Jesus. You find it in Nature by a power of your reason which you cannot discredit. It is the first law of heaven, and everything in the sky above and in the earth beneath conforms to it, and has its being because of it. Not a leaf varies from its position, or a bud from its proper place on the branch, any more than a star departs from its fixed course in the sky. Look at the way in which the scales are arranged one over the other in a pine-cone, or the separate florets in a daisy, or the different leaves around their stem, according to a fixed law which the mathematician can express by numbers, and you have a deep impression of the wonderful regularity with which the processes of Nature go on. And Jesus carried the same love

larity and peace, just as the particles in a chemical solution will crystallise into shapes of beauty round a nucleus which is itself a perfect crystal.

The last lesson which I wish to bring before you, is the value which Christ sets upon things that have served their purpose. You might suppose that it was of no consequence how the napkin and linen clothes were treated, when Jesus rose from the dead and cast them off. They might have been thrown aside any way, left to lie as they dropped off. They were of no further use. They were signs of Christ's humiliation, of the power of death over Him; and you might imagine that Jesus, in the glory and power of His resurrection, would not wish to be reminded of the painful and shameful trials through which He had passed, and would hurry these tokens of them out of sight anyhow. And yet He did not so regard them. He folded them up carefully and treated them with reverence. They had served a useful purpose. They had clothed His dead body. Great honour was conferred upon them, when they were employed to wrap the sacred body of the Son of God, as it was miraculously kept from corruption in the new sepulchre of Joseph; and because of this honour they were honourably dealt with. Moreover, they were the tokens of a deep and true affection. Had it not been for Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus, the body of Jesus would have been cast, with the bodies of the malefactors by His side, into the common pit in which criminals were buried. But

the long pent-up love of these hitherto secret disciples awoke at last, and rose to the greatness of the occasion, and they buried the crucified Nazarene like a king. They took Him down tenderly from the cross ; they wrapped Him in the finest linen shroud with spices and ointments ; and when they laid Him in the tomb, they covered His face with the napkin and shut the tomb, and left Him to what they thought was His long repose. And oh, how sorrowful, how like to break, would be their hearts all the time ! Jesus could not but treat with the utmost reverence and tenderness the linen clothes and the napkin that were the tokens of such remarkable devotion.

It is thus, too, that God deals with the things in Nature whose use is over. The leaves of a tree serve but a temporary purpose, and yet how perfectly constructed is each leaf, how brightly it is coloured in autumn, just when its end is served, and it is about to drop off the branch ! How lovely are the petals of the flower, even though their sole use is to form the fruit, and when they have fulfilled that purpose they fade and fall ! Take up one of the scales that drop from the expanding buds of spring, and examine it carefully. It is beautifully finished ; it has on it the red of ripeness. It is a leaf that has stopped short in its growth, the last diminutive leaf that remained on the branch all through the winter, when the other perfectly-formed leaves fell off. And yet, because it has done true

service, and protected the bud from winter frosts and storms, which, without it, would not have unfolded in spring or yielded fruit in autumn, God has given to it, even though now it is cast aside, the beauty of the ripe fruit. Look at a straw that has spent itself in supporting and nourishing the full corn in the ear, and is now withered and dead, and trampled under foot. How wonderfully beautiful is the golden colour and the shining gloss upon it! It is said of the great Galileo, that when asked by the Roman Inquisition as to his belief in God, he took up from the floor of his dungeon a straw, and said that he could prove the existence of God from the construction of that little object. You do not wonder that God should adorn things that are to be of permanent use; but you are astonished that He should lavish so much loveliness upon things that only serve a fleeting purpose. And yet in Nature it is the things that are most short-lived that are most richly endowed.

God everywhere wraps up with care the napkin and the grave-clothes that had served a useful purpose, in protecting some new form of life until it was ready to unfold its fulness. And did not He who folded the napkin reverently in the tomb, carry with Him the nature of His humiliation, and all the experiences of earth, to the highest heavens, and appear on the throne of glory "a Lamb as it had been slain," still retaining the wounds of the cross? Jesus reverenced the things He left

behind ; and so He taught a wise lesson to you. You are tempted to think that it is not worth while to do carefully and well what is to last only a little while, and to serve a temporary purpose. The scaffolding by means of which the building is to be erected is run up roughly and hurriedly. The basting stitches in a piece of cloth are large and coarse, because they are to be taken out when the fine sewing is finished. But is not your whole life-work on earth the scaffolding, the basting stitches, as it were, for the enduring work of eternity? And therefore what would justify you in doing one part of your work carelessly, would justify you in doing the whole in the same fashion. Imitate, then, God's perfection in everything you do. Do all your work not as unto men, but as unto the Lord ; and though it will soon pass away, its spiritual results will remain in yourselves beyond that day in which no man can work.

And in regard to another aspect of the lesson, you are tempted when you have reached a certain stage of advancement to look down with disdain upon, and to seek to forget the immature lower state in which you were before. Those things that you have outgrown you are apt to despise, as the full-grown leaf might be supposed to despise the bud in which it had been wrapped all winter. But the lesson of the carefully-folded napkin, and of the beauty of the fallen bud-scale, teaches you that the details that fall away from your life, as you grow older and

wiser and better, are a part of your larger life, which without them would have been impossible. You are, therefore, to treat them reverently. The Talmud forbids a man to cast a stone into the well from which he has just drunk. Jacob, we are significantly told, buried the idols of his household "under the oak which was by Shechem," when his clearer faith had outgrown the need of them. Human love and devotion had given to these images a kind of sanctity; and therefore they were not thrown out with the common refuse, but received at the hands of the patriarch gentle and reverent usage. The Jews were commanded every year at the Feast of Tabernacles, to leave their houses and dwell for seven days in booths, after the manner of their fathers in the wilderness, in order that they might not lose sight in the present, of God's leading in the past, and to quicken in them the sense of what they had been. And so it is good to act in spirit in the same way from time to time as you advance in life, that you may treat with reverence the things you have left behind.

Your whole life here will soon end. Your body, upon which you are lavishing so much love and care, will one day be left behind, like the linen clothes in the tomb, when the spirit has fled. But it will be treated not like a thing ended and done with forever, but, like the folded napkin, with care and respect; not merely because it enshrined during life an immortal spirit, but also because it is to be

raised from the dead, and to become the home for evermore of that spirit in the new heavens and the new earth. Our rude forefathers undervalued the body when dead, and laid it roughly in a churchyard where rank nettles and unsightly weeds were allowed to flourish over man's neglect. We have learned better the lesson of the folded napkin in the tomb; and in our well-kept cemeteries, with their lovely flowers and shrubs, we show the reverence for the dead which Christ has taught us.

We are told that John saw and believed; and yet how little did he see in the tomb! He had not waited to see Jesus Himself. He had not seen the angels who appeared to the other visitors. All that he saw was the empty tomb, and the grave-clothes folded up, and the napkin lying in a place by itself. And yet it was enough. He knew that the body of Jesus had not been stolen away. When he saw in the tomb not the slightest trace of hurry or disorder, but found everything so carefully arranged, he recognised the manner and the method of Jesus. It was so like His ways! And there stole over his soul, without much logical evidence to rest upon, the faith of a little child, which does not reason about, but accepts a truth that is given to it. John was thus the first of those who see not and yet believe. You have evidences greater far than John had of the reality of the Resurrection. For you have not merely the folded napkin and the grave-clothes; you have the Gospel narrative and

the witness of the Spirit, which tell you in a manner so plain and full that the simplest child cannot but understand, that He who died for your sins, rose again for your justification, and ever liveth to make intercession for you.

And what a wonderful hope is thus set before you in the Gospel! How blessed is the thought that the terrible mystery which has affrighted us all has been dispelled! I remember a dark pool in the neighbourhood of my native place which was said to be unfathomable. You could not see an inch into the awful black water; and the young people looked upon its frowning face with a shudder every time they came near it, and were mortally afraid of standing on its brink. One day a boy braver than his fellows ventured to put his foot over the edge, when to his surprise he found the water quite shallow. Encouraged by this, he waded in very slowly and cautiously, feeling his way, and though the water deepened, it was so gradual, that in the middle of the linn it only reached up to his waist. He walked from one end of it to the other, and dispelled forever the terrible mystery of the unfathomable pool; so that the smallest boy in the place delighted to wade in it. And so Jesus has sounded the lowest, darkest depths of death, and has emerged triumphantly on the other side; and now He appears to you beside every tomb into whose dark depths you gaze with dread, and says, "Fear not . . . I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for

evermore . . . and have the keys of death." Beside Christ's empty sepulchre you will understand that the graves of your own beloved dead are empty too. The dear garments laid aside, the clean linen clothes are there folded securely, and cared for by the angels of God. But they themselves are risen. And as they have risen, so will you, if you are partakers of like precious faith ; and the clothes you will leave behind will be taken by Christ into His own keeping, and restored to you in a more glorious form at the restitution of all things.

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